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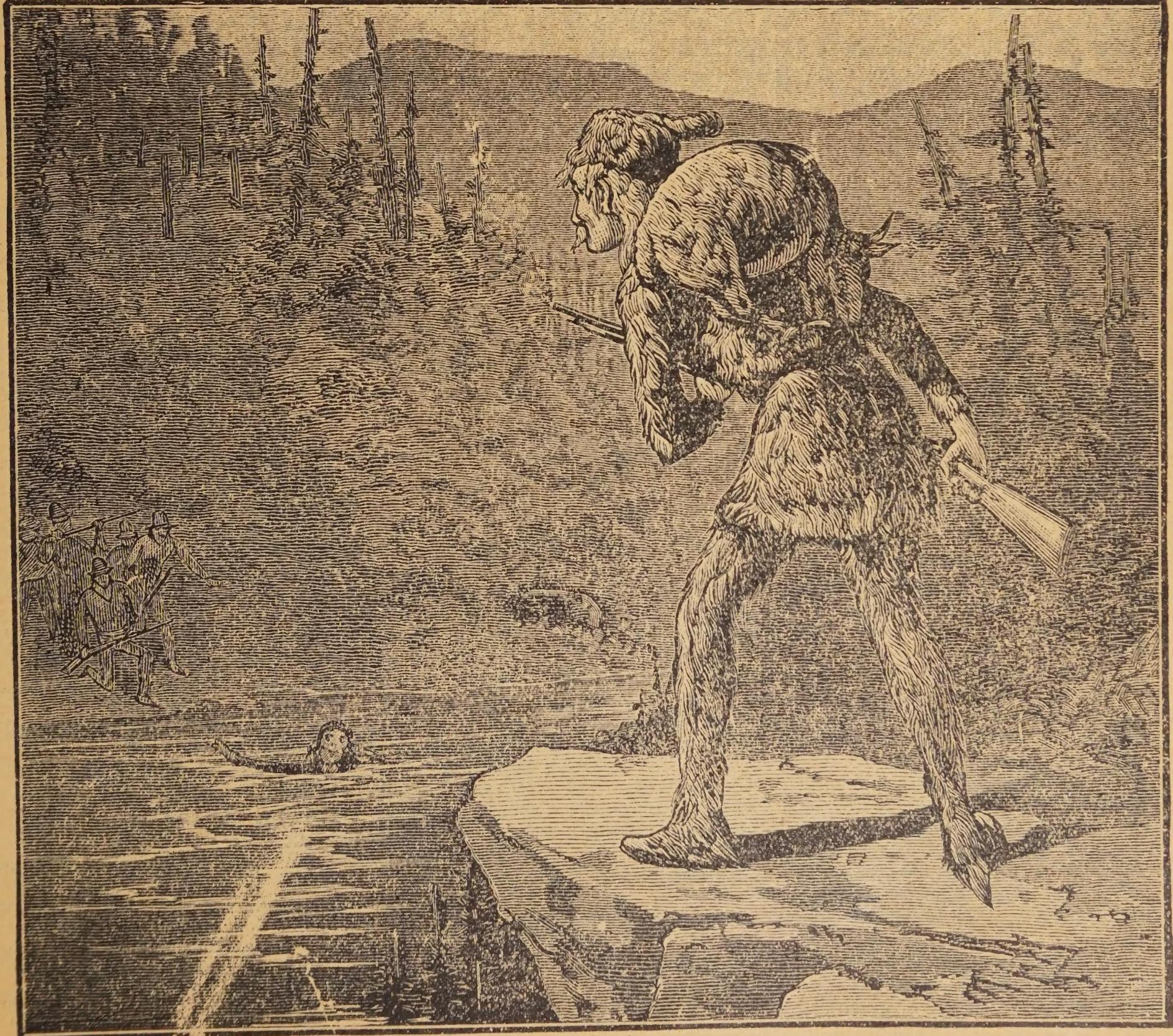
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No. 11.

BOSTON BILL: or, THE MAD MOUNTAINEER.

By COL. DIMON DANA.



BOSTON BILL;

OR,

THE MAD MOUNTAINEER.

By COL. DIMON DANA.

Author of "Buckskin Burke," "Mountain Max," "Buckskin Burke's Defiance," "Rival Plotters," "Kenton," Etc., Etc., Etc.

CHAPTER I.

STRANGE ADVENTURES.

"HELP! h-e-l-p!"

It was a woman's voice, ringing out sharp and clear.

Two men standing under a huge pine tree in a wild, lonely valley of the Sierras, started with surprise, and gazing across a rapid mountain stream flowing at their feet, beheld a startling scene.

Unknown to them, at the same time, upon the opposite side of the tree, a third person arose to a half upright position, and saw the sight that held them for a moment spellbound.

A short distance up the mountain side was a narrow foot-path leading to a mining settlement, called "Lower Lead," farther up the valley.

Midway in this path, where it fairly overhung the river, was a girl of perhaps eighteen years, confronted by a huge cinnamon bear.

She had been coming up the narrow way to suddenly meet the furious brute at this point.

She had screamed, and then starting back, uttered the appeal already given.

Rearing himself upon his haunches, the monster seemed to be regarding her with a look of malignant satisfaction, while she shrank still farther away, trembling with fear.

"It is Hattie Percival, Tom," exclaimed the foremost of the two men.

Without answering, the other sprang to the edge of the water's bank, his movement arresting the attention of the maiden and her enemy.

The bear gave a sharp growl and fixed his small, piercing eyes upon him.

With a look of joy the girl cried:

"Oh, Tom, save me!"

He half raised the rifle he had in his hands, and then lowered it as if uncertain what to do.

Her white face was turned beseechingly toward him, and again she implored his aid.

"Ha! so you are glad to seek my friendship, now!" he exclaimed.

The bear growled and seemed about to spring upon her. Had she moved her doom would have been sealed. Knowing this, she remained motionless as a statue, while the single word left her lips:

"Help!"

"Promise to be my wife, and—"

The wretch had no time to say more. With a fiercer growl than any before, the brute turned from watching the man to attack her.

A wild cry rang from her lips as she realized her peril. Flight was hopeless and she seemed lost.

Another growl, and the maddened monster sprang toward her.

Hardly knowing what she did, the maiden turned to flee, when, glancing wildly down upon the stream, she saw her only chance of escape, and small as that appeared, she

sprang out over the angry tide to sink rapidly downward beneath the dark depths.

At the same moment she cleared the pathway, the bear reached the spot where she had stood.

Cheated of his prey, the enraged creature paused abruptly in his headlong course, when the sharp snap of a rifle rang out upon the air, and then, with a terrific roar, he staggered back with a stream of blood flowing down his shaggy side.

Tottering to and fro for a minute with hoarse, maddened cries, he stumbled, and with a last growl of pain fell head foremost into the water.

The twain upon the bank saw the brave girl come to the surface of the foaming stream, a short distance below, to be borne swiftly away by the rushing current.

One of them was about to go to her rescue, when to their surprise another man from beneath the pine leaped into the river and swam rapidly to her assistance.

"Let him take care of her, Jack!" exclaimed the one called Tom.

"But where in the world did he come from?"

"I —— look there, Jack Clinch!"

The speaker pointed up the valley as he uttered the exclamation.

Standing on a projecting rock that overhung the river was the form of a man—and such a man!

He could not have been less than seven feet in height, with a figure as straight as a hickory sapling, but almost fleshless. His face—all that could be seen, was a pair of eyes that seemed like two balls of fire, a long, thin nose, and a tangled mass of snow-white beard that reached to his waist. His hair was of the same hue, and fell far down his back. His garb was made of skins, and hung in tatters.

Over his left shoulder was flung the carcass of a mountain sheep, while on his right hand he carried a heavy, rusty-looking rifle, still smoking from a recent discharge.

He stood with his right foot extended, and seemed to be gazing complacently down the valley.

"'Tis the Mad Mountaineer!" said Clinch, in a low tone.

"'Twas he who shot the bear."

"Mebbe. But who in creation was that chap wot went arter the girl?"

Without replying he turned back, to discover a dark object lying near the trunk of the pine.

Hurrying to the spot, he picked it up, with curiosity. It was an old battered fiddle.

Near by were footprints and the evidence of some one having lain upon the ground.

The two men gazed upon each other with unfeigned amazement.

"He must have been there when we came," said the younger one.

"D'yé s'pose he heerd wot we said?" asked Clinch.

"Case ef he did, Tom Bradley, our game is balked!"

"We must know before we go back to the city. He will come back after his fiddle; let's wait here."

"Greed."

Meanwhile, the intrepid stranger, who had so nobly gone to the rescue of the maiden, was battling manfully with the furious tide.

He had sprang into the stream a little below where she had reached it, and almost at the same moment.

Quickly stemming the current, he prepared to grasp her in his strong hold, as the flood should bear her within reach.

The river narrowed somewhat here, and in an instant he saw her white face for a moment upon the surface, and then it disappeared, when suddenly her drenched form was tossed almost into his arms.

Grasping her firmly with one hand, he began to fight the tide with the other.

Knowing that he could not gain the safety of the bank where it was so high and precipitous, he allowed himself to be borne rapidly down stream with the current, protecting himself and charge as best he could from being dashed against the rugged shores and boulders of the river.

Swept swiftly away thus for a short distance, he saw a point where he fancied he could land, and preparing for the hazardous task, he clutched at the bushes growing upon the bank as he was carried on, to save himself, with an almost superhuman effort.

Nearly exhausted, he drew himself out of the water, with the unconscious girl still in his arms.

Muttering horrible oaths under their breath, the two men beneath the pine stood ready to meet him, with a deadly purpose in their minds.

CHAPTER II.

A TROUBLESOME CAPTIVE.

LAYING the maiden gently upon the ground, the stranger bent over her with a look of anxiety.

"She lives!" he exclaimed, with joy, as her eyes slowly opened, and she gazed around with wonder.

"Where am I?" she asked.

"Safe. I have just pulled yeou out of the river, but I guess yeou will be none the worse for your ducking."

"Oh, the bear! I remember, now; and you have saved my life, kind sir."

"Tain't no 'count—scuse me, miss; I mean what I did weren't any 'count," he said, in confusion. "But can yeou walk now? Mebbe yeon would like to go home?"

"Thank you, yes; I live in Lower Lead city, only a short distance above here."

"Jes' so; mebbe yeou'll 'low me to 'scort yeou hum; 'scuse me, miss, but I had nigh 'beout forgotten it; I hev a hoss somewhar 'beout here. Let me git him, and you can go in style then."

Without waiting for her to speak, he dashed into the undergrowth, and a few minutes later reappeared with one of the sorriest specimens of a mule, we dare say, ever seen in Calaveras county.

Nor was the animal less strange in appearance than he.

He was tall, with an awkward form, a shock of yellow hair, small, twinkling blue eyes, thin, sharp features, and a heavy, tawny mustache.

His garb—well, we hardly know how to describe it. A snuff-colored swallow tailed coat, too narrow across the back for his broad shoulders by fully four inches—though it did make up in length what it lacked in width, by reaching to the tops of his enormous boots. His unmentionables were evidently patterned after the same style, for after making his nether limbs resemble somewhat a pair of candle-molds, they descended just as far as his coat did. His vest was "a chip of the same block," fastened together with pieces of strings running from the twin rows of huge brass buttons, and its front was well polished with grease. He wore, securely fastened upon his head by a huge cord, an old, battered white beaver hat, that had evidently come over to this country in the *Mayflower*, for,

beyond dispute, this odd specimen of the *genus homo* was of Puritanic stock.

Uncouth as he was, and drenched with water, he presented an appearance both strange and laughable.

"Neow, ef yeou'll jess let me sot yeou on Abraham's baek, yeou'll go to the city in style. He's clever es Mary's lamb, and'll stick to a fri'nd like 'lasses candy."

She was about to object to his offer, but seeing that he spoke with apparent honesty, she allowed him to assist her upon the raw-boned animal's back, when he handed her the reins, which were merely a couple of strings fastened around the brute's jaw, saying:

"Thar, I reckons heow that's cute. Neow d'yeou scoot for hum while I go back to the old pine and get me Laughin' Jewel, and then I'll foller arter yeou."

"Bnt, kind sir, I am troubling you too mnch."

"Scoot for hum and git them wet duds off. I swoow to hemlock, yeou look like a drowned rat."

Hesitating no longer, she started the mule toward her house.

"By gosh!" exclaimed the Yankee, "she is es purty es a butter-cup."

About eighteen years of age, Hattie Percival was indeed a beautifnl maiden, with dark-brown eyes and hair, and a clear complexion softly touched with the hue of the rose.

Watching her out of sight, the Yankee then started toward the pine.

"Back!" hissed Bradley to his companion; "let's hide behind the tree, and when he comes up we'll nab him. Mind the word."

Quickly springing to one side, so that the tree-trunk came between them and the approaching stranger, the twain impatiently awaited his coming.

Humming a low ditty to himself, the person at last paused beneath the pine.

"Kem hyur, me Laughin'—"

Before he could finish his speech, the waylayers sprang from their covert to seize him.

Though taken completely by surprise, he made a frantic resistance, to be overpowered at last and borne to the earth.

"Lie there!" cried Bradley, as he pressed his whole weight on the fallen man.

"Don't!" gasped the other. "Yeou hurt, 'squire, I swar yeon dew!"

"Let me have a string, Jack, and I'll fix him," he went on, unheeding the prisoner's supplications.

A cord was speedily procured, when the Yankee was securely bound.

"W'at in gracious dew yeou mean, me lord dooks? I ain't hurt yeou."

"Who in the world are you, prowlin' 'round here?" exclaimed Bradley, as he surveyed him in evident surprise.

"Who am I?" cried the stranger, as soon as he could speak. "Sho! hev yeon explored this yer comit so menn yurs and don't kneow me? Whera hev yeou let yeour light shine? Ain't the city chock full o' me bills with me name in red and black letters spotted like a zebrum es big es a cart wheel? 'Sqnire, I am William Boston, right from the Hub o' this great and glorious universial! Yas, me 'squires, I am the ginovine Bosting Bill, the great moosician o' the east, kem to show to the folks hyur the biggest concert on 'arth, not 'cepin' Phin. Barnnum's cattle show."

"I guess you had better come with us, Mister Bosting Bill, I want to have a talk with you and I am afraid we shall be disturbed here."

"Dew yeor m—mean tew—tew kill me, 'squires?" faltered the musician. "'Cos ef yeou dew, I hed rather be 'scused. I'm ar' con—"

"Shut up, you Yankee fool, and come along peacefully."

"Sho! Waal, I swar' to pepper-sass, d'yeou take me to be a calf? I ken flop the handsomest hand-speek in a lasses hogshead—"

Clinch brought his hand upon the other's mouth with a force that nearly felled him to the earth.

"Reckon ye won't hev the last word alwus, old copper-side!"

Boston Bill's eyes flashed daggers, if there is such a look, while the villain pressed his horny palm upon his bearded lips, but as soon as the other had dropped his hold, the Yankee blurted out:

"Old eyes-in-head, free my tater-grippers, and I'll show yeou heow to call me names! I'll smash every brain in yeour jaws, I will, old blinkers! Yeou ain't fit to pick up pizen-cabbage in the dark. Jess give me elbow room for me-mud schooners to swing on straight out and out."

The said Clinch, for reasons of his own, kept at a proper distance, and the villainous twain were beginning to think they had got a troublesome captive.

Without further talk they led him into the darker region of the valley where it was seldom the miners were called.

Pausing at last in a wild, rocky gorge, Tom Bradley seized his prisoner, saying, in a low tone that bore the accent of a deadly purpose:

"Boston Bill, I have heard of you. Now, though——"

"Hold right on, me lord dook, d'yeon say yeou hev heerd on me? Oh, jess undo my paws, so I can shake——"

"Hold your tongue or I'll strike you dead!"

"Dead? Thet's wot ailed granser's yaller chicken. He sort o' quirked up into a knot like a burnt——"

Bradley seized him by the throat.

"I'll see if I can't get in a word edgewise!" he exclaimed. "Now if you don't answer every question I ask you, I'll send this knife through your foul body as true as I hold it in my hand. No lying, either, mark you. In the first place, how long had you been under that tree?"

That he might speak, Bradley released his hold on Boston's throat.

"What time is it now, 'squire?"

"Dog, answer my question!" and the other stamped his foot madly.

CHAPTER III.

WORSE AND WORSE.

"GRACIOUS 'arth! heow can I, till you tell me what time it is neow? I laid deown thar tew take a snooze, I can swear to thet, 'squire."

"Did you hear us when we came up?"

"How could I, 'squire, and be asleep tew? I'm pesky sorry I didn't hear yeou, bnt mebbe——"

"No matter. You swear you heard nothing that was said until the girl screamed?"

"Look a-hyer, 'squire, ain't yeou a leetle a head o' yeour story? I didn't say I heerd the gal. I heerd a tarnal sort o' a queer kind o' a bumpus thet fetched me onto me boots quicker'n scat, and yeou kneow the rest. Where is me Laughin' Jewel—me moosic box?"

Jack winked to his companion, as much as to say that they had nothing to fear from him.

"You are the biggest blockhead I ever saw, Bill Boston!"

"Sho! That's cute!"

"I have half a mind to lay you out; but on one condition I will spare your life."

"Jess so. Thet's wot Bets sed—she's me gal, yeou kneow. She and I'd a hitched only yeou couldn't find a harness thet would a hilt us."

Bradley fairly frothed with rage.

"Do you want to die, Bill Boston?"

"Waal, I swan, I ain't axed tew. 'Em concerts——"

"Stop!"

"Thet's wot marm sed when I put her pickles in the ash hopper. Gosh! wan't thar sum hoppin' when——"

"Fool!" cried Bradley, seizing him by the throat, "I'll

"Oh! gracious 'arth! don't pull so hard, 'squire. Yeou hurt!"

"I'll break every bone in——"

"Good Lord, Tom! Look out!"

The warning from Jack Clinch came too late.

There was a crash in the undergrowth, and then Tom Bradley was hurled violently to the earth, quickly followed by Clinch.

With a wild cry the Mad Mountaineer stood over them.

Too surprised to speak, Boston Bill gazed upon the strange being in silence.

Clinch and Bradley essayed to rise, when he fiercely seized each of them by the shoulder, and giving expression to a startling yell, he dragged them rapidly toward the river.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Boston, as they disappeared in the bushes, "I reckon I hev 'portant business sumwhar else. I must go."

Scrambling to his feet, with his hands still tied behind him, he ran toward the pine, and, succeeding in freeing his hands before he got there, he seized his fiddle and hurried on in the direction taken by Hattie Percival.

"Queer doin's," he muttered. "But, arter all I hev seen and heerd this arternoon, I reckon I'll poke down to Lower Lead and show 'em some fun. Mebbe some on 'em need a hornet in their ear."

Meanwhile the Mad Mountaineer had borne his victims to the bank of the river, when, in spite of their struggles, he hurled both of them into the seething tide.

Crying for mercy, the unlucky twain were borne swiftly away.

Dancing upon the bank with wild delight, their strange enemy watched them out of sight, and then sought the mountain fastness.

Half-stunned by their rough treatment, the ruffians were borne some distance ere they could comprehend their situation.

Rallying then, and both being good swimmers, they finally succeeded in gaining *terra firma*.

"This is a pretty go!" muttered Clinch, as he viewed their sorry appearance. "What in creation'll happen next?"

"A general smash-up, judging by the last few hours. But come—we must hurry back to the city."

Nothing loth, the other assented.

They had not gone far, however, when he clutched his companion by the arm, crying:

"There he is, Tom!"

Bradley turned pale as he saw the Mad Mountaineer standing beneath the pine.

The body of the mountain sheep was again flung over his shoulder, and in his right hand he clutched his formidable rifle.

"He mustn't see us!" gasped Jack.

"Who in the world is he?" asked Bradley, as soon as he felt they were at a safe distance.

"I dunno," replied the other, with a dubious shake of the head, "and I don't b'lieve anyone does. He 'peared all o' a suddint in the valley, and Old Nick on a rampage ain't worse nor he is."

"Well, we must steer clear of him hereafter. I don't like that Yankee, either."

"We hev made a fearful bosh to-day, Tom."

"I know it, all on account of that accursed Yank. But we have got to keep on the lookout sharper, hereafter. We shall have to get him out of the way if he shows himself again."

"Oh, he ain't enny great scratch," replied the other, carelessly. "He's a regular greeny, corralled slick as a young 'possum. So you are bound to captur' the claim?"

"We must! We ain't come 'way up here from 'Frisco to go down into our boots now. We were fools for letting Carver have a third on the claim. I am afraid he will be a hard coon to lift out."

"Not so very heavy, old pard. I think I can manage him. Seems to me old Percival is the toughest dog to oust. He's old and —"

"Ha—ha, Jack! You are barking up the wrong tree, now. You say you can handle Birch Carver. Now, I can take care of old Percival, true as you live."

"Then we are on the straight road to fortune and glory, as an old uncle of mine used to say. But how do you float the stick?"

"Well, as you see that old Percival and Carver each hold a third share, our best plan is to get possession of one of those shares. Then we shall have a controlling interest in the lead. By waiting we can speedily drive the other out, by foul means if not by fair. In this land strength is the basis of law, you know."

"You are a brick, Tom," exclaimed the other, slapping him on the shoulder. "But I don't believe that young scapegoat, Dan Harris, with old Percival, will let the old man sell out. In fighting the last, we have got to consider Harris as in the ring against us."

"I know it; and that makes me all the more bitter against the old man. You see I have a score to settle with that chap."

"I know. He sort of cut you out in your attentions to the fair Hattie. I —"

"He lied to the old man and sort of got into his good graces. Of course there was no chance for me then. But, Jack Clinch, I am going to have that girl if it costs me my life. You may have the lion's share of the mine, only let me have her."

"I knew that was what you were driving at. But, Tom, you had better let her alone; we are sure of a big haul if you do."

"We are as it is; I won't give her up, for I want to see that Dan Harris step down and out. Birch Carver must be bought out somehow or other, and then we'll make it so warm for old Percival that he'll be glad to git up and git."

"All right. But here's the city," as that moment they came in sight of a mining settlement lying at the base of the mountain.

"Lower Lead" was a rich claim, but for all that it had passed through three owners, and had the name of being played out.

One-third was together owned by Clinch & Bradley, while the other two-thirds were held by as many claimants.

Let subsequent events, however, unfold the rest.

CHAPTER IV.

"TAKE HIM, TIGE!"

THE shades of night were beginning to fall upon the earth, and Lower Lead city, which only an hour before had been so quiet, was now alive with activity. The miners then at work in the claim were now seeking an evening's relaxation after the day's hard toil.

At the lower end of the village was the old quartz mill, which looked as if its part of the work of "turning out" the golden treasure was nearly over.

Near the first entrance was situated the company's office, and here, though the old building was otherwise deserted, were the owners of the "lead."

First was Captain Percival, seeming well along in years, though he bore himself erect, and paced the floor as lightly as he would have done ere the frost of his last decade in life had made his once dark hair almost the hue of the driven snow.

As he pauses in his hurried walk, he speaks to a stout-built man in the prime of life, who owns with him an equal share of the "Lower Lead," as the claim is called to distinguish it from another farther up the valley.

"Birch Carver," exclaimed Captain Percival, "I don't understand it. We must either repair the crusher and put more energy into the work or else abandon the claim. It does not pay now."

"There is enough of the yeller stuff to make it pay, captain, I know," replied Carver.

"You are mistaken, Birch," retorted Tom Bradley, arising from his seat on a dry goods box by the side of Jack Clinch.

After leaving Boston Bill the twain had hastened to the city.

"It has paid well in times past, and —"

"So did the Malvern pay till it was panned dry. Old Wyman got all the meat and left us the bones. Don't you think so, Jack?"

"Find me the man who will take my share off my hands, and I'll show you what I think of it," replied Clinch.

Bradley nodded approvingly.

"'Twould be a hard thing to do, I am thinking," he said.

Carver looked surprised.

"Not so very hard, Tom Bradley," exclaimed a voice in the doorway. "I will take your share off your hands and pay you all that you gave, Mr. Clinch."

"Confound that Dan Harris!" ejaculated Bradley, under his breath, as they looked up to see a young, good-looking man enter the room; "he is always where you don't want him."

"Then you think the claim will pay, Dan?" asked Carver.

"If I didn't I should not have offered to buy Clinch's share. Say, Jack, is it a bargain?"

"I—that is—I guess I won't sell till I find a chance somewhere else. Come, Tom, I promised Allison I would be at the Paw-Paw before this," he added, as if anxious to leave the place.

"Come, Birch, ain't you coming, too?" asked Tom, as he started to follow his companion; "I don't see as we can do any good by staying here longer."

"I don't care if I do go with you as far as Allison's," replied Carver.

The trio had gained the outside of the building, when a wild outcry on the street above caused them to pause in surprise.

They were not kept in surprise long as to the cause.

A minute later a man came rushing into sight, running for dear life, and crying:

"Save me—save me!"

Hatless, with his long yellow hair streaming out in the wind, while his face looked as white as a sheet, it was Boston Bill!

Close upon his heels followed a huge red dog, baying most furiously, and threatening to seize the fugitive at every bound.

Seeing the three as they came out of the mill Boston shaped his course toward them, renewing his appeals for help.

"Kill the creetur! shoot 'im! save me or I'm a goner!"

With wonderful celerity a crowd gathered upon the street, hooting and shouting lustily.

At their head came one waving his hands, and yelling, excitedly:

"Take him, Tige, take him!"

"Oh, Lud!" gasped the frightened Boston Bill, as he fell prostrate from exhaustion and terror at the mill, "I never was so dead before!" and he lay like a log.

The dog sprang over him, and in another instant he would have buried his sharp teeth in the musician's flesh, had it not been for an unlooked-for interposition.

Captain Percival and Dan Harris, hearing the outcries, had rushed to the door just as Boston fell almost at their feet.

Seeing the danger, Harris hastily drew his revolver and shot the brute ere he could touch his victim.

Boston Bill lay motionless, either not daring to move or else too much overcome to do so, until quite a crowd had collected around the spot.

"Get up," said Captain Percival. "You have nothing more to fear, sir."

"Is it d-d-de-ad?" gasped Boston, turning partially over, and trembling like an aspen.

"Dead as a pine knot!"

"Then—then I can go fer me hat? I must hev dropped it somewhar," and the musician raised himself to a sitting posture.

"Who shot my dog?" exclaimed a hoarse voice, as a man pushed his way through the crowd.

He was a short, thick-set individual, with a coarse, repulsive visage, and immense head, covered with a matted mass of fiery-red hair.

"I say, who shot my dog?" he repeated, in still louder tones, as he raised the dead animal's body in his arms and glared fiercely around.

"Dan Harris was the chap!" cried Jack Clinch.

"Jess show him to me!" snorted the maddened man. "I'll show him how to shoot down my pup."

"There he is in the mill door-way," affirmed Tom Bradley, following the example set by his associate.

The owner of the dog glanced up to meet the gaze of Harris.

Dropping the canine's body, he exclaimed:

"So 'twas you, Dan Harris, who put that lead into my poor Tige?"

"I shot him, Allison, to save this stranger from his fangs. I——"

"You shot him, did you, and face me as coolly as if it was all right? I'll show you what it is to shoot a dog of mine!" and, with a horrible oath, the wretch sprang furiously forward with clenched hands, thinking, no doubt, to fell the other with a single stroke of his sledge-hammer fists.

Perhaps he might, if he had hit him, but dexterously dashing up his excited assailant's arm, Dan dealt him a "left-hander" just back of his right ear, which sent him sprawling to the ground.

He gained his feet, however, a minute later, and trembling with rage, he prepared for a second attack.

CHAPTER V.

"I GIVE UP."

"HOLD on, Allison," cried Dan. "I meant no offense in shooting your dog. He would have bitten this man if I had not done so just as I did. However, I am willing to pay you whatever price is right for him."

"Pay me," gritted the other through his clenched teeth. "Will that give me back my dog—my favorite dog? No, sir-ee. You haven't got money enough to bring him back to life. But I'll be even with you, Dan Harris."

A latent fire gleamed in the man's blood-shot eyes. He had evidently been drinking, and was considerably under the influence of the liquor.

Harris saw that it was of little use to bandy words, and yet he wished to avoid a fight if possible.

By this time Boston Bill had raised himself on his knees, and gazing in apparent amazement upon the exciting tableau, he drawled out:

"Pitch in, lemons, and I'll sing Hail Columby!"

Allison, with his first defeat, had grown wary. He wished to take the other off his guard, and yet that seemed a hard thing to do.

"Gin it to him," cried a voice from the crowd. "He no need to have shot your dog, only he is up to poke fun at ye!"

The speech nettled Allison, and he fairly shook with rage.

"And you shot my dog to save that pup?" yelled he, pointing to Boston.

"Yes; for I thought the animal would tear him to pieces."

"Bah! what is that low, mean, sponging, sneaking, sniveling whelp good for, any way? I set the dog on him to drive him out of the place."

"Then you are all the more to blame, Jim Allison. I——"

"To blame? Wot shu'd I do? I hed to do sumthin' to git rid of the vermin. He owes me for a full week's board, and——"

"Oh, me lord dooks, hear me!" cried the musician, by this time gaining his feet and swinging his arms as if they were a pair of flails. "I kem to this place a poor, honest mortal, deluded into the hope that I could raise a few ducats hyar—jess enuff tew spin on the twisted thread of this universal comet. With me beluv'd Laughin' Jewel under one arm I called at the lofty Eagle into whose eyrie I stole, sayin' to meself: 'William Boston, in this hyar glorious kentry you'll make yeour dinging fortitude.'

"Es I cast me sleepless winkers over the splendorious place I let loose all the moosic chained up in me old fiddle, and the way it flew abeout would hev made a hen with the wuss toothache larf."

"Squire James B. Allison, Esquire, looked up to me, and says he——"

"Stop that fool's clatter, or I'll blow his brains out!" cried the tavern-keeper. "I hev heerd enuff o' him."

"Don't run away with yeour tongue, I am jess gettin' deown to the moosic. Yeou sed——"

"You lie!"

"Sho! I ain't sed a word; and I was only goin' to say wot yeou sed."

"Well, we've kem to a purty pass when sich galoots es he kems to a place and runs the hull shebang."

"Don't mind him," put in Bradley, who had an idea of his own to carry out. "Dan Harris was the chap who shot your dog."

A silence rivaling death had fallen upon the spectators, and every word that was spoken fell upon the air with startling distinctness.

"Go 'way, ye spindle-shanked fiddler!" growled Allison, "I am after the murderer of my dog."

"But I jess' want to tell this enlightened awdooence heow I hev been humbugged. I kem hyar tew give 'em the loudest concert they heard since the declare uv independent by our roostrons father uv the country, Davy Crocket! Hyur I hev been starved to me boots on one cabbige head and half an unyun—oh, 'squire, I'm done fur!"

The angered Allison had sprang toward him, and with a tremendous blow sent the speaker spinning to the earth a rod away.

A loud shout went up from the lookers-on, and as the attention of Harris was momentarily turned to the fallen man, Allison thought to overpower him.

Concentrating all of his strength for the intended blow, he turned to attack Dan.

Quick as he was the other was too nimble for him.

Springing lightly one side to escape the ruffian's furious onslaught, Dan at the same time extended his right foot, and dexterously catching Allison upon his toe threw him heavily to the earth.

Quivering there for an instant like a beast of prey, the madman then sprang to his feet and blindly rushed for his foe.

As cool as ever Dan stood his ground, meeting the other's fiery attack with the precise defense of one who understood his business.

Allison foamed at the mouth, and great beads of perspiration stood out upon his forehead. He struck wildly right and left, but every blow of his was effectually parried.

He saw that he had found more than his match, and the thought maddened him.

Bradley saw it, too, and was watching his opportunity to

aid the tavern-keeper, if he could only do so without betraying himself.

The crowd had fallen back to give the combatants a fair chance, while Bradley and Clinch stood near the ring thus formed.

Captain Percival and Birch Carver were still standing in the doorway.

Allison had received a smart blow on his left cheek that had left a crimson mark there, and he was being pressed slowly backward.

"A hundred dollars that Dan Harris rings him out!" cried a voice from the throng.

"You are a fool if you let him, Jim Allison!" spoke out Jack Clinch at the suggestion of Bradley. "You are big enough for him!"

The tavern-keeper gnashed his teeth as he heard the taunts.

He drew back as if going to retreat, and then, with compressed lips, he sprang at his antagonist.

Dan met the fierce onset with a well-directed blow between the eyes, that for the third time sent Allison prostrate.

"Oh, you have killed me!" he gasped, writhing in pain. "I give in; you are too much for me."

Shout after shout went up from the spectators, till the air fairly rang with the cries.

Groaning piteously, Allison struggled to his feet.

"Dan Harris, you are a mean scamp to kill my dog, and then nearly kill me."

"I did not provoke the quarrel, and I offered to pay for—"

"Great horned bears, look out for him!" yelled the Yankee.

Harris, not dreaming of treachery, faced the tavern-keeper, when suddenly he caught the gleam of a revolver in the latter's hand.

The spectators gave a cry of horror, but before any of them could reach him he leveled the weapon at Harris.

The ruffian's finger pressed the trigger, and an instant later the bullet would have been sent on its deadly mission, when Boston Bill, quick as a flash, seized the body of the dog, and threw it against Allison with such force that he fell, and the shot went into the air.

CHAPTER VI.

A MYSTERIOUS SHOT.

AFFAIRS had taken such a strange and sudden turn that it was several minutes before the spectators could recover from their surprise.

Meanwhile Allison once more gained his feet.

Glaring furiously around, he exclaimed:

"Who hit me?"

Before anyone could reply, Boston Bill planted himself before the other with folded arms, saying, in a matter-of-fact way:

"Hyur is the boy, me lord dook; enny remarks to observe?"

Livid with rage, Allison cried:

"Stand aside, you crazy old fool! I ain't got through with Dan Harris, yet!"

"Yaas yeon hev' me 'squire; leastways till yeou settle with me. So yeou call me a crazy old fool, du yeou, and arter keepin' me a week on cold raw unyuns! I'll teach yeou heow to consult me!"

"Bah! you—"

"I'll make yeou blarr! Take that, yeou red-headed pig-pen!" and before the other could ward off the blow, he had dealt him a sharp slap with the flat of his hand.

The villain seemed dnmfounded.

"Keep me on raw cold unyuns another week, will yeou, 'squire? and then set the pup on me 'cos I don't happen to pay me board bill; I'll show yeou heow tew—heold right on, me tearin' up old red puddin'; William Boston ain't kem to Lower Lead for nothin'. He's goin' tu give the

bigest concert ever heard this side o' the Rockies or go bail for—"

Allison rallied and hit the speaker a punch in the stomach that would have knocked the breath out of any common mortal.

"Hit him ag'in!" cried the fiddler. "This am a free show and I ain't only a lot o' old duds stuffed full o' sawdust!"

Saw-dust or not, Jim Allison suddenly felt himself seized as with a grip of iron. He was dashed to the earth and raised up again. He was flung to the right and to the left. His ears were rubbed till they smarted with pain; his nose was snubbed till it bled. He was chucked under the chin and whacked over the head till the air was full of stars. He grew faint; he grew dizzy; his legs seemed broken and his arms seemed twisted from their sockets. In short, never in his life had he received such a shock. Had he been run through the crusher of the quartz mill he could not have seemed more bruised and literally smashed.

He cried for help, and at last, whining for mercy, he was allowed to fall upon the ground, where he lay in a huddled heap, too weak and terrified to move.

"Jess—so!" exclaimed the Yankee "moosician," with a broad grin on his good-natured visage; "the best thing fer a sick headache is tew bind on a lot o' bird-hawk leaves. Me marm was sort of third cousin to Nat White's uncle, on the south side o' the housen. Jiminy Link! hyar I am open-headed! I must hev me bunnit or freeze," and an instant later he disappeared in the crowd.

When at last Allison slowly regained his feet he didn't act a bit as though he desired to continue his fight with Harris.

A more sorry specimen of a man had seldom ever been seen in the Lower Lead.

"He jess beats Old Johnson's mule arter he got crunched under the landslide!" declared one of the amused spectators.

The lookers-on had managed to "make a smile do the occasion" till now, when every man broke into a loud guffaw.

"Where is the galoot gone?" growled Jim, as he surveyed himself with a look of disgust.

"Half-way to Crazy-Horse Mine by this time," replied one.

"Waal, let 'im go. He jess knocks the hind sights off uv enny chap I ever seed," muttered the discomfited man, as he started to leave the place. "I'd a-staked my bottom dollar the pesky fool weren't uv enny 'count!"

Seeing that the "fun" was over, the crowd began to disperse.

By this time it was getting to be quite dark, so that Captain Percival, accompanied by young Harris, repaired to his home, while the miners generally sought their loafing places where they invariably went as soon as their day's work was over.

"I don't understand what Tom Bradley means by his singular conduct," said the captain, as soon as they had passed beyond the hearing of the miners.

"Neither do I," replied Dan. "It is either because he is sick of the mine or else he wants to get it all into his own hands."

"But it can't be the last," exclaimed the old man, quickly. "You know he has not money to swing the whole of it."

Harris shook his head. Though far younger than his companion he understood a great deal better the peculiar men who went to make up the little settlement. In fact, the other was a novice in mining affairs, and had simply invested his money in the Lower Lead because others had told him that it was likely to prove a rich claim.

Harris had early seen this, and too honest to see the captain despoiled of his all, he had come forward to befriend him, when, in turn, he had been, with the consent of Carver, chosen superintendent.

"We can hardly tell, captain, what Bradley and Clinch—for they go together, you know—have back. In case there should be any trouble—I am supposing the case, for I really do not expect it—I repeat, in an emergency like that, could we depend upon Birch Carver?"

"I think so, Dan. But do you really fear any disturbance?"

"As I said before, no. Still we do not know what may happen. There is Jim Allison; he may make us trouble."

"True enough. He is a hard case. But what do you make of that stranger?"

"I will confess that I do not know how to answer you. That man is an enigma. I believe he has been here before in the company of Buckskin Burke Stanton; but what he is here for now I cannot tell."

Nothing occurred to arouse them farther, until they reached home, when they listened with surprise to Hattie's adventures.

"You must not run such a risk again, dearest," said her lover, as she finished. "Tom Bradley has clearly shown that he would not hesitate at any crime to carry his purpose. Do not leave your home again without an escort, please!"

"But he will harm you, Dan. Oh, I fear that dreadful man!"

"Never fear him on my account, Hattie; I shall be on my guard against him."

"Do be careful for my sake as well as yours, Dan."

Leaving the lovers to the happiness of each other's company, and to talk over the events of the day, we will return to the arch-schemers, Bradley and Clinch.

CHAPTER VII.

FUN, INDEED!

MEANWHILE, Tom Bradley and Jack Clinch repaired to the Eagle House, kept by Allison, whom they found narrating to a crowd of excited listeners his version of the affair at the mill doorway.

"Jess let me set my eyes on that Yankee again, and I'll lay him out, or I don't know my name!"

"Oh, he's half-way to 'Frisco by this time!" exclaimed a bystander, with a laugh.

"But how about his concerts?" asked another. "They are advertised for to-morrow night."

"I tell you what it is, boys," chimed in a third, "the old coon is down to Mack's."

"Let's go down and have some sport."

"Hold on, lads," cried Allison. "I know of a trick worth two of that. Let him alone until to-morrow, when, as he is giving his 'concerts,' as he calls his show, we'll pitch in and have the most fun that was ever seed in Lower Lead at once."

"Hooray! That's the talk, Jim! We'll egg him and tater him!"

"And tar-and-feather him, and ride him out of town!" put in a huge gold-digger.

"Every bit of it!" chorused the wide-awake throng.

"But hark ye!" exclaimed Allison. "Not a word of this must be whispered outside, so he will get hold of it, or the ornery chap will light out, and spoil our game."

"Depend on us for that, Jim."

Bradley, who had been watching his opportunity, now stepped up to Birch Carver and motioned for him to follow into an inner apartment.

Wondering what was coming, the other joined Tom and Clinch.

"We want to talk over affairs," commenced the first, as soon as they were alone. "You see, things ain't moving just as they ought to."

"In what respect?" asked Carver, in surprise.

"Is it possible you have not seen the way we are drifting? You have a clear head, Birch Carver."

"I have always been successful in whatever I have un-

dertaken," replied the other, with evident pride. "I cannot see any danger now. Business is moving along smoothly, and I think we are going to make a haul out of this claim yet, despite the discouraging beginning we had."

"But don't you see that Dan Harris is getting so he runs the old dotard of a captain?"

"All the better for us, then; Dan's judgment is far superior to the old man's in work like this."

Bradley shook his head.

"You don't know him as well as I do. He intends to get the old man's property as well as his daughter."

"Possibly; though I like Dan. But I thought you had business of more importance than that of which you wished to speak."

"So we have, Birch. The fact is, Jack and I are sick of this claim. It is a dead pull."

Carver looked surprised.

"Perhaps you have not seen it, Birch, but Jack and I have."

"Why, I thought the lead good; truly, it promises rich so far."

"One third less per ton than when Wyman ran it."

"That is because we have not had the means to tunnel deeper. As soon as we get a new crusher in and put on extra hands, I'll warrant you more than 60 per ton."

Carver had confidence in the "lead;" that was certain.

Bradley saw it, and changed his tactics.

"I knew what you would say, Birch, and I told Jack we had better come to you. *He and I want to sell out our share to you!*"

Birch Carver sprang to his feet in unfeigned amazement.

Bradley knew that he was safe in his offer, as he was aware that the other could not raise the money.

"Want to sell out!" exclaimed the surprised miner.

"Why not? The claim will never pay, and we are tired of it. We have eight hundred dollars invested here, but you may have our entire title for six hundred!"

"Will you take good security for it?" he asked, eagerly.

"We must have the money down."

"Then I cannot buy. I would not hesitate to do so if I could raise the money."

"I am glad your courage is so good. But as long as you cannot buy why not sell? Unless some sort of a change is made the claim is gone up!"

Carver's surprise increased.

"What will you take for your share?" asked Bradley, coming abruptly to the point.

"I don't want to sell!" replied the amazed Carver.

"You are a queer one. You refused to buy ours at a discount: now set a price on yours."

"I had rather not."

"Fudge! name your figures. Of course, we have no idea of buying unless you do the fair thing."

"This is so sudden. I must have time."

"Pshaw! Will five hundred do?"

"No, I could think of nothing less than a thousand!"

"Then you set your price at a thousand?"

"No—no! I don't name any price, now."

Bradley saw that it was useless to press him further. Accordingly, he said:

"Very well, Jack and I must go, now. At the end of an hour we will meet you here again, and you shall say whether you will sell or buy. We are determined to do one or the other to-night."

Without another word the precious twain went out of the room, leaving Birch Carver wondering what made them so anxious for a change in the ownership of the Lower Lead claim.

As soon as they had left the Eagle, Bradley said to his associate:

"Now while that fish is cooking I will show you how I

can drive Boston Bill out of the place, for he must go to-night! Come with me, Jack, if you want to see some fun."

Fun, indeed! Now, William Boston, we will see what your mettle is!

CHAPTER VIII.

BRADLEY'S WARNING.

"DRIVE Boston Bill out of the place!" ejaculated Clinch in surprise.

"Why not?"

But Allison and the others are going to do it to-morrow night."

"Time enough if he don't leave before. But, Jack, see here. Our safety demands that he should go before."

"Do you think so?"

"Of course. Don't you see that he must go before he has a chance to tell Percival and Harris about what we did this afternoon?"

"I see the p'int now, Tom! You're right. He must go at once!"

"Of course he must. But come with me, and second all that I say, and I'll show you how to manage him."

"Oh, we can take care of him easily enough," was the careless reply. "But, Tom, do you suppose them chaps we heerd up in the valley this araternoorn freed that Yank?"

"It must be. I tell you, Jack, I'd like to know who they were, and what the fool said to them."

"Mebbe we shall find out some time."

"Perhaps. But here we are at Mack's. Now for one of the sharpest games you ever saw played on an unsuspecting greeny."

"Here, Tom Bradley," cried a burly bystander, as our plotters entered, "we have taken a vote here that every man who comes from Jim Allison's shall stand a treat."

"Then you have got me," replied Bradley, good-naturedly; "so walk right up, boys."

Nothing loth, the spectators obeyed, when Tom saw Boston Bill seated upon the top of a pile of candle-boxes busily engaged in making some repairs to his old fiddle.

"Come along, Mr. Boston, I don't intend to leave you out."

"Wa'al, I swar' that's cute, 'squire; but yeou'll hev to 'scuse me this time. Yeou see I hev got this string into a ternal snarl."

"No excuse hyur!" cried some of the others. "Ye hev got to stand your turn like a man," and the Yankee was pulled from the boxes to the bar. "Pile out the benzine, Mack."

A minute later the glasses began to rattle, and then amid a moment's silence they were drained.

Had not every eye been occupied, some would doubtless have seen that the strange Boston emptied his liquor on the floor.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed, smacking his lips with apparent relish, "thet'll cure the corns on yeour stummick, or yeou may call me a green pea."

Finding that his "treat" had cleared him from the crowd, Bradley turned to the Yankee, saying:

"Mr. Boston, I have a message to deliver you, and I shold like to see you in the card-room."

"Gosh! has Bets writ?" cried Boston, beginning to dance about. "I know'd she'd kem to it. I tole her I war a powerful sight better-looking and smarter, and—waal, of course I can't remembrance all I sed."

"Follow me," said the other, impatiently, as he led the way to an inner apartment.

"Look a hyar, 'squire, this yer chap hes follered us like a pup arter its marster!" exclaimed the Yankee, pointing to Clinch, who had accompanied him.

"Oh, never mind him; all I wished was to escape the crowd."

"Sho! I always liked to see a heap o' folks together. It puts me in mind of camp-meeting and string-beans. Say, me lord dook, did von ever bill a hornets' nest?"

"No."

"Wa'al, I must say it is the all-firedest big fun yeou ever seed! In the fust place yeou hev got to capture it, and I tell yeou that'll jess make yeon ky-ya when a hull nest full o' the speckled creeters git to bobbin right into—"

"Are hornets speckled?" interrupted Tom.

"Gosh ef I kneow! They'll make yeou speckled enny-way. Es I war sayin' the nest'll sort o' bubble up and you'll think it am done sure when the first yeou'll kneow the biggest lot o' green eggs'll—"

"Bill Boston, I have come to see you on a matter of life and death," broke in Bradley. "If you choose to give me a chance to talk, all right; if not, I am going."

"Gosh! that so? Heave ahead, me lord dook. I war born deaf and dumb and hev been tongued-tied ever since. My dad—"

Bradley gave him a look that caused the speaker to stop.

"Bill Boston, do you know that you are in deadly peril every minute you are in Lower Lead?"

"Sho!"

"That even now men are lurking around street corners ready to shoot you?"

"Gosh!"

"And that others are hunting for you in every direction?"

"Gracious!"

"You can not realize the awful fate that even at this moment a set of blood-thirsty cut-throats are planning for you."

"Hemlock knots! yeou deon't say so, 'squire! My concerts'll beat all nater, won't they?"

CHAPTER IX.

BOSTON BILL'S REPLY TO BRADLEY.

TOM BRADLEY was mad, though he dared not show it.

"Look here, Bill Boston, as a friend I have come to warn you. I see but one way for you to save your life."

"Sho! Would yeou propose a rope or a bullet if yeou—I won't speak ag'in to-night—I swov I won't, 'squire, ef yeou won't look so pesky red pepperish."

"Do you want to die, Bill Boston?" hissed Bradley, through his clenched teeth.

"Wot a question. I sh'u'd jess like to live to a hundred and sixteen, jess to plague Bets. She says I hev got the yaller saffern. D'yeou see enny signs of it, 'squire?"

"Bosh! Hear me. As true as you give that concert to-morrow night you will be rotten-egged!"

"Gracious! that won't be ennything to wot I got up in Shenango. They jess plastered me from head to foot with rotten eggs and taller. Wasn't I a sight? Then they put pepper in me eyes, and stuffed me mouth full o' wood and set it on fire."

"But you will find no boys' play here. You will be dragged from the building and hammered like a beast. You will get a coat of tar and feathers and—"

"My sakes, me lord dook, all that ain't nowhar side wot they did down to Dry Town. I went in thar chipper as a young hawk, and war reelin' off one o' me charmin' ditties, when kerchnnk went a great lump o' dirt right deown me hash alley, which sort o' mnifled me dulcet strains. From that I hed a pin stuck mor'n six feet throngh me back that made me beller right eont. The next I know'd I war ready to swear that the great 'arthquake of the Judgment had riv', and was playin' foot-ball with the deluded hoss-show of a Dry Town. I war perbumlexed orfully. Seven forty-hoss-power crushers couldn't a begun to hev shook me up so. Then to climax the cap I war spread out like an old olmanac, and so menny feathers and wings stnick on me that it took four boys and a mule to keep me from flyin' off. Fact, 'squire."

Amazed, Bradley managed to say:

"It's none of my business. But as a friend I thought

it my duty to warn you. There is a plan afoot to give you a fearful drubbing, and then to hang you to the big pine at the foot of the valley. It will be done as true as you stay in the place another day."

"Waal, I don't keer 'bout that. 'Tain't nowhere 'side wot I got deown tew Loon Gulch! Yeou see deown thar they jess went tew work and throwed a pile o' neither, or some sich stuff, on to me, and then they toted me off, jess as ef I war a lot of ovenwood, and then they took and tied a mule to me—no, tied me to the mule—waal, may I be flung cl'ar around this comet in a tater skin, ef I know which. Howsumever, the mule and I war left to dance together. Guess we did, tew. They say we kept it up for seven hours and twenty-eight minutes, and then that mule sloshed in his skin jess like jelly hid away in a stone jar. So'd I, tew. Of course it killed the poor creeter, but yeou see it didn't hurt me a stip, 'cos thet ar' neither had taken away all me senses. When I took up me fiddle and started up the valley tew post me bills for a new cert, them ar' chaps looked at me madder nor stung hornets. Yeou see, I hev seen sum, me lord dooks."

"Dare you stay here after all that I have told you?" said Bradley.

"Gosh, yes! I'll show you sich sights."

"But you are a dead man if you do!"

"Sho! Then I sh'u'd be sure to stay 'ere; I c'u'dn't git away then."

"You are a fool, Bill Boston!" gritted the other.

"S'pose'n I am, 'squire, 'tain't likely I want to be told ov it."

"Well, I do tell you of it!"

"Sho!"

"And if you were not a coward you would resent it."

Tom Bradley's temper was getting the best of him. He sprang forward, and dealt the other a smart blow with the palm of his hand.

"Take that, and return it if you dare, you Yankee dog!"

"My gracious, 'squire, ain't yeou got more feelin' than to hit a fellow like that? Yeou hurt!"

Turning quickly to Jack Clinch, he continued:

"Would you serve a fellow like that, me lord dook?"

"That I would," retorted Clinch; and he instantly gave a repetition of Bradley's blow on the Yankee's other cheek.

Quick as a flash Boston Bill's long arm shot out, and before the astonished wretches could defend themselves, he seized them by the shoulders and brought their heads together with a force that made them see more stars than the heavens ever seemed to contain.

In vain they begged for mercy. From the floor to the ceiling overhead Boston churned them about, until it appeared as if every bone in their bodies was broken.

Fruitless were their attempts at resistance; they seemed no more than toys in his herculean grasp, until at last, becoming tired of the sport, he tossed them into a corner of the room, with a grim smile.

"Reckon, me lord dooks, yeou'll hev something tew talk uv 'sides big finds at the lower end o' the valley, and sich doin's as peaceful fellers don't keer to hear. Good-night, babies; I'm goin' eout to buy up the Lower Lead, and run it on my own hook."

Then the strange man strode out of the room as unconcernedly as if nothing had happened.

And that is how Tom Bradley succeeded in scaring him out of the valley.

CHAPTER X.

CLINCH TRIES HIS POWER ON CARVER.

BRADLEY and Clinch arose to their feet, sadder and wiser men.

"Don't he beat all?" exclaimed the last, as he ruefully surveyed his person. "I believe every bone in my body is broken."

"So do I. But I guess we ain't as bad off as we seem."

"Are you going to tackle him ag'in?"

Bradley shook his head. He had evidently seen enough of the Yankee for a time.

"We must leave him to Jim Allison and the others, to be handled tomorrow night. Let's go back and see what decision Carver has come to."

"Anything to git out of this."

Reaching Mack's bar room, they saw that Boston was not there.

Chagrined at that, though glad to escape him, they went out into the night.

A few minutes later they were back to Allison's, where they found Birch Carver.

"Can we see you alone now?" asked Tom of him.

The other assented, and a little later they were together in the room they had occupied earlier in the evening.

Assuring himself that no listeners were around, Bradley began:

"I suppose you have decided what you will do?"

"Yes; I think, on the whole, I will not sell."

"Not sell? You are making a mistake, Birch," replied both of the surprised plotters, for they had felt confident the other would yield.

"Perhaps so; but you have my answer, and I must go."

"Stay! There may be some inducement to cause you to change your mind."

"I think not. In fact, I am determined not to sell."

"Suppose your personal safety demanded it?" and a latent fire shone in the villain's eyes as he spoke.

"But there is nothing of the kind."

"There is?" hissed Bradley, bending forward.

Birch Carver sprang to his feet in amazement, a dread suspicion flashing across his mind.

"What is it?" he gasped.

"Ask Jack, here," replied the other.

Carver turned an inquiring gaze upon Clinch.

"Don't you know me, Ad?" asked the latter.

Carver turned deadly pale.

"You—you can't be Ruell Thorn?" he gasped.

"No; but I am his brother, Ad Harlow."

Birch Carver's face brightened.

"I should—in fact, I did not know Ruell had a brother."

"He had, and I know all that he did of that affair in 'Frisco."

The other grasped at the table for support, as he managed to exclaim:

"Why do you speak of that, Mr. Thorne? It is long since past."

"I know, but not forgotten yet. I thought it might have an influence on our bargain. It might be an inducement for you to sell, you know."

Carver comprehended then the sort of men he had to deal with, and he trembled like an aspen as he said:

"I cannot see why it should. I am located here and I intend to remain."

"Not if the hangman's rope can draw you away!" hissed Bradley.

"What do you mean, gentlemen?" cried the other, with increased alarm.

"Simply this, Ad Harlow; either sell your share of the Lower Lead to us, or we will deliver you up to the hounds of the law within thirty minutes."

As Bradley spoke, he drew his revolver.

"Spare me!" groaned the terrified victim. "I did not mean to do it. I was drunk at the time."

"Drunk or sober, you did the deed, and you shall suffer for it unless you agree to our terms."

Birch Carver hardly seemed the careless miner in the power of his reckless foes.

"Ruell Thorn got me to drink, and then led me on, when my brain was fired with the liquor, to rob the man, and in the struggle, for he resisted, I accidentally shot him."

"I don't care anything for all that. You killed the man, and it is in our power to make you suffer for it."

The once strong man bowed his head upon his hands, weak now as a child. He had done the deed as he had said, and it had so preyed upon his mind that he was but a wreck of his former self.

"Come, give us a deed for your third of the claim, and we will give you five hundred dollars, and allow you to go in peace."

"Peace? There is no peace for me."

"You will be safe, at least. Only we two know your secret here in the city."

The stricken man groaned aloud.

"I have dreaded this!" he moaned.

"Come, don't be a fool, Ad Harlow. All that we ask is a deed for the mine. You can go where you wish, then."

"It is a just punishment upon me!" he exclaimed. "There is no peace for me with a guilty conscience. But 'twas liquor that made me do it. Oh! I have hated the sight of the vile stuff ever since."

"Look here, you have two minutes to decide in; will you sell out your claim, or die upon the rope?"

"I will sell out. Perhaps I may find peace somewhere else. But stay, theré can be no peace for me."

Unmindful of his words, the villainous twain goaded him to still greater desperation, until, an hour later, they held the deed of Birch Carver's—*alias* Adley Harlow—third share of the Lower Lead claim.

"Now we will see Captain Percival, who runs the mine," said Bradley, exultantly, as, with his assistant in robbery, he sought his boarding-place for a night's rest, leaving their victim to shift for himself.

Early the next morning the plotters were astir, and wended their way toward the house of Captain Percival.

"If we carry a firm hand now, the game is ours."

"Yes, we roped out Carver slick."

With manifest surprise the captain met them at the door.

"Astir early, gentlemen."

"Yes; we wished to see you before work-time."

"Indeed! Walk in. Important business, eh?"

"Very," replied Bradley, who generally did the talking for himself and Clinch. "We have concluded that it is not best to put in that machinery as was desired at first."

Captain Percival looked surprised, but waited for the other to continue:

"Mr. Clinch and I do not think it will pay. The lead is down to nearly twenty per ton, you know."

"Yes; but it promises better."

"I must differ with you there."

"Well—well," replied the old man, urbanely. "Of course we will consult Mr. Carver before we take any decisive step."

"That will be hardly necessary under the circumstances. Mr. Clinch and I have bought out Birch Carver's claim!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE STRIKE.

"BOUGHT out Birch Carver's claim?" repeated the captain, in undisguised amazement.

"Yes. You see he got discouraged over the prospect, and as he offered to sell at a merely nominal price, we took his share."

"But he seemed in good spirits yesterday."

"Only show, to keep the miners all right, I assure you. Clinch and I were anxious to get out of it, and offered to sell out for a hundred dollars a share, but he would not buy. We only paid him one hundred and fifty."

"One hundred and fifty!" exclaimed Captain Percival. "Can it be possible?"

"I hardly think we made a wise bargain at even that figure, captain. So you conclude that we had better not put in the machinery?"

"I have not said so. Really, I must consult Mr. Harris before I decide."

"What, Captain Percival, do you allow yourself to be run by that young swellhead?"

"Tom Bradley!" cried the old man, springing to his feet excitedly,

"what do you mean by such language in my house?"

"Pardon me, captain," exclaimed the other in alarm, lest he had too far aroused the excitable man's anger, "I ought not to have said that. I was led to from what I have heard. Of course, you are aware that the miners are very much opposed to him for a superintendent any longer."

Captain Percival stared upon his partners, too much surprised to speak for several minutes. At last he said:

"You must be mistaken, gentlemen."

"We are not. Of course we have nothing against him. But somehow the miners do not like him. Again, his threat to cut down their wages naturally enough caused some hard feelings."

"But he did not threaten to do it, Mr. Bradley, he merely, in answer to Dennis Biven's request to have the pay raised, said that we were paying better now than Markham's Lode, Crazy Horse, or any claim hereabout."

"Be it as it will, they look upon it in the light I spoke of. I wondered myself, at the time, that he should have said it, but supposed he did it upon the authority of Mr. Carver and yourself."

"So did I," chimed in Clinch.

"Where is Carver?" asked Percival, suddenly changing the drift of the talk.

"Gone to Stockton."

"I am surprised. I wished for him to take charge of the hands to-day."

"Then you have decided to ship Dan Harris!" exclaimed the schemers in great joy. "It is a wise move, captain."

"Not so fast, my friends. The fact is, Dan has been called unexpectedly away for a couple of days down to Markham's Lode."

The ruffians exchanged significant glances.

"Then we shall have to have a new superintendent. But you must excuse us now, Captain Percival."

After a few words more the twain departed, leaving the other in a perplexed state of mind.

What did their strange conduct mean?

Let me follow them and see.

"The game is ours, Jack, if we only follow it up!" averred Bradley, as soon as they had joined the street.

"What next?"

"We'll go to the miners and tell them Dan Harris has gone to Markham's Lode to get a lot of new hands, and fire them up to strike. It can be done; and we'll fix old Percival so that before that would be son-in-law of his shall return he will wish he had never seen Lower Lead."

We will not follow too closely the trail of the villains' wholesale lying.

Suffice it to be said that Tom Bradley in one way if no other, was as good as his word. He repaired at once to Jim Allison's and gave out that Percival intended to cut down his miners' wages. He said that Dan Harris had gone to get new recruits for fear the old workmen would not yield to the reduction.

As it was yet unknown, save to two who were bound to secrecy, that Carver had sold out, the wily schemer dared to say that he, too, had gone on the same mission.

After winding up a glowing recital of all this, Bradley said:

"I know better than any of you, perhaps, that the lead is too poor to think of advancing your wages, but it is an outrage to talk of reducing them."

"Hooray for Tom Bradley!" cried one of the throng. "He's a whole-souled man, wants others to live as well as himself."

In a few minutes the schemer's name was lauded to the highest pitch.

"I say, boys," cried one, a tall, lank specimen of a miner, "let's strike on the old cusses!"

"A strike—a strike!"

"Look hyar, Tom Bradley, we don't mean to hurt ye or your pard. Jack Clinch," cried Dennis Bivens, of whom Captain Percival spoke in his talk with the plotter. "Jess git rid o' em others and we'll do the fair thing by ye. But it's a strike to all till ye do, or we hev our wages rizl!"

Bradley smiled and nodded his head.

His plans were working well.

Urged on by Jack Clinch, Bivens stirred up the miners for a strike.

Of course the better portion revolted at first at the movement, but pretty soon the stories put in circulation induced them to join the ranks of the strikers.

In the midst of this state of affairs work hour came, when the ireful miners began to collect at the mill.

Captain Percival was already in the counting-room, and as the time for roll-call arrived he prepared to go through with it.

Taking up the paper, he began:

"Worth Weymouth!"

"Worth am gone to Crazy Horse to look arter a job," ventured an old miner.

Showing his surprise plainly, the other went on with his roll:

"Dennis Bivens!"

"Look hyar, cap'n," exclaimed the individual in question, "I reckon we chaps don't spond this mornin' worth a cent."

The old man looked up in amazement.

"Ye see," continued the speaker, advancing, "we ain't up to yer ways. We want the fair thing done by us, which 'tain't. So we're goin' to take the lead inter our han's. We strike for higher wages!"

"Yes—yes! More wages! A strike—a strike!"

Like cries rent the air, and in an instant all was excitement.

"Hear 'em, boss!" cried Bivens. "D'y'e think they'll hev that Harris a-fetchin' his new men in hyar to drive 'em out?"

"But Mr. Harris—"

"Give us more wages! We will never lift the pick until you do!"

"Mr. Harris will—"

"Hang Mister Harris! Not a man shall come into the mine."

"What d've say, Captain Percival?" asked Bivens, as soon as he could make himself heard for the crowd. "Will ye raise our wages, or—"

"Raise 'em quick!" thundered the throng.

"I cannot—"

"Take the galoot out here!" yelled a fierce-looking miner.

"Rope the old man!" exclaimed another. "He ain't fit to live! Wants to cheat the poor man of honest wages!"

"Fetch him out hyar. We'll stretch him on a dance from six feet o' rope!"

With hoarse cries the excited mob pressed around the old man, and his resistance was futile in the mad struggle that followed.

CHAPTER XII.

BOSTON BILL ENDS THE STRIKE.

In the midst of the wild outbreak a new actor appeared upon the scene.

As Captain Percival was dashed to the floor, a sharp voice cried:

"Hold, every man of you!"

Little heed paid the mad rabble to the words.

Even heartless Tom Bradley trembled for the result as he saw his partner overpowered, but he made no offer to assist him.

Suddenly a tall form appeared among the crazed miners.

From whence he had come none could have told.

In an instant he sprang into the midst of the struggle, sending man after man to the floor with powerful strokes of his arms.

Turning in dismay from the fallen Percival, Bivens and his immediate followers found themselves facing their unexpected foe.

The first drew his revolvers, but before he could use them they were knocked from his grasp, and he himself was sent headlong.

Nor were his friends slow to follow as the other dealt his herculean blows.

In the twinkling of an eye, as it seemed, the scene was completely overturned.

With the amazed miners struggling among themselves and trying to regain their feet, the new-comer raised Captain Percival to an upright position, as if he had been a child, saying, laconically:

"Waal, I swan to sore eyes, 'squire, yeou're all dust from top to bottom."

"'Tis Boston Bill!" cried one of the amazed spectators, and then every tongue uttered the name.

"Waal, that's cute!" exclaimed the individual in question. "Who'd a thought yeou all a knowed me? Beats all nater."

By this time Dennis Bivens had gained his feet, and, glaring upon the intrepid Yankee, he cried:

"Shoot the dog, boys! Show him no mercy!"

The command was too cold blooded for the strikers to carry out. As far as they were lost from reason they were not ready for such a crime.

The speaker staggered forward, howling:

"Why don't ye 'bey me? I'll do it ef ye won't!"

Whatever his intentions were, he had no time to carry them out.

With surprising agility, Boston Bill reached his side, and with one of his well-directed blows, sent him sprawling upon the floor.

"Jess stand back!" he cried, turning to the crowd. "I ain't hyar for much of a leetle spree, but ef yeon chaps don't toe the mark, I'll fix more black eyes than yeou ever see'd in one day!"

The spectators stood as if spell-bound.

"Who are you, come down to tear round like this?" one ventured to ask.

"Who am I, me lord dook? I rather kalkilate I am the hefty eend o' the Niagrear falls on a rampage. But all I ax is for yeou to keep proper distance."

Tom Bradley and Jack Clinch were anxious lookers-on. It would not do for them to interfere, though they began to fear that the Yankee would get the best of it.

For the second time Bivens gained his feet. This time he was more careful how he conducted himself.

"William Boston," he began, "I—"

"Hold right on, 'squire, yeou hev begun wrong! Me name ain't William it's *Willum!* Neow start right and then go ahead, as the old father of our kentry, Davy Crocket, used to say."

"Bill Boston—"

"No, 'squire, *Willum!*"

Bivens ground his teeth with rage.

"*Willum* Boston," he gritted, "what d'ye mean?"

"I mean tew jess run this hull machine, me lord dook! Thet's all."

It was enough to amaze the burly miner.

"Boys," he exclaimed, turning from the audacious stranger to the wondering spectators, "take and throw the fool out of doors."

"Gom' to begin neow?" questioned Boston, with an impudent, quizzical look upon his comical-appearing countenance as the crowd hesitated to obey the order; "Cos I want tew tell yeou thet when yeou carry me eout o' hyer yaou'll lig me heels fust!"

Instead of advancing the spectators sprang back a step as the determined speaker coolly uttered the words.

What sort of a man was he to make such a threat, unarmed?

Not a muscle of his features moved as he calmly faced them.

"Bah!" exclaimed Bivens, his visage fairly livid with excitement.

"I'll—"

"Blar-r ag'in ef yeou dare!" interrupted Boston, "and I'll drive every tooth o' yeour down yeour throat! Hear wot I hev to say, and then ef yeou want fight, pitch in and I'll lick the hull caboodle of yeou, or I won't own me shoes."

Bivens paused, and one of the miners cried:

"Go ahead, old galoot. You're sum!"

"Am I, old chop? I'll show yeou heow tew dispierence me good name es soon es I git me hands free. In the first place, I want to know who beginned this rumpus?"

"I s'pose I did--leastway I war one on 'em," replied Bivens, sullenly.

"Wot for, me lord dook?"

"Cos we want our rights. 'Em chaps es think to run us want to run ns inter the dirt, and we struck. Yes, siree, we struck! Old Harris cut down our wages, and then started for new hands down to Markham's. We'd not stand thet, and so we struck."

"Waal, I'll jess tell yeou one thing, 'squire, I'll struck, ef yeou don't git! Thar ain't been no cut down on wages, nor thar ain't a-goin' tew bel Old Clincker and Bradup thar hev lied to you."

As Boston Bill uttered this bold speech he turned his small, piercing eyes upon Bradley with a look of contempt.

"It's a lie!" cried the latter, hoarsely, trembling with passion.

"Is it, 'squire?" queried the Yankee, quickly. "Then melbbe ef yeou are so good to take a lie yeou'll take thet, tew," and before the other could divine his intentions he received a blow that laid him prostrate.

To the surprise of all, Bradley staggered to his feet without offering to return the blow of his foe.

"I'll pay you, Bill Boston!" he hissed, and slunk back into the midst of the lookers-on.

As a minute's silence fell upon the scene, Captain Percival improved the opportunity to say:

"Gentlemen, I am sorry to find that you have ali been laboring under

a great mistake. There has been no reduction in your wages, nor none intended. Mr. Harris will be ready to arrange satisfactory terms with you as soon as he returns from Markham's. Under present circumstances we will not think of work, and you shall have a holiday, with your pay going on the same as ever. Before to-morrow—”

“The fight ain’t over yet!” cried a hoarse voice, and to the amazement of all, the Mad Mountaineer stood a short distance off, leaning on his heavy rifle, while upon his shoulder he had the carcass of Jim Allison’s dog!

“No, the fight ain’t over yet,” he continued. “I shall come back after dinner,” and before the spectators could start after him he was gone.

After a few minutes they recovered from their amazement.

CHAPTER XIII.

BOSTON BILL’S CONCERT.

THE surprise of the crowd, as they listened to the words of honest Captain Percival, may be well imagined.

They began to see their mistake.

“We were wrong!” exclaimed one.

Bradley scowled, and stopped one of the miners from assenting to the speech, but he saw that the captain’s declaration had proved “oil upon the troubled waters.”

The excitement began to abate at once, and half-an-hour later all was as peaceful as ever. Had everything at the mill, as regards the machinery, been in good working order, labor would have doubtless been resumed immediately.

Tom Bradley felt by far the most vexed. Indeed, he felt maddened by the defeat of Bivens.

No epithet that he could find was strong enough to express his hatred toward Boston Bill.

To Jack Clinch, he said:

“We must drive the dog out of the place to-night or we are lost!”

The day wore away, and night once more hung over Lower Lead.

Mack’s was the place selected for the entertainment, and thither the hard-working inhabitants of the locality began to collect as soon as the shades of darkness came on.

Boston had fitted up a sort of rude stage at one end of the building, by laying a lot of slabs upon a row of dry-goods boxes and covering them over with skins.

With his inseparable fiddle in hand, an old, begrimed clay pipe, with a stem so short that its bowl came exactly under his nose, in his mouth, and a broad grin upon his countenance, Willum Boston stepped from behind the curtains and bowed low to his audience, when loud cheers filled the room.

As soon as he could make himself heard, he spoke, as follows:

“Me lord dooks, it ‘fords me leventeen hatfulls in a row of perfect delight tew see so many live ones on this comet, an’ tew know that they hev come tew listen tew the distressenedest concert that was ever given in his hull univarse. Yes, ‘squires, I mean that and a sight more, fer I tell yeou this hull consarn, this antedevullum, ez yeou mought say, is run by Willum Boston, the genuine Boston Bill. Neow, ez yeou hev shelled eout the ducats like fall rain, an’ twas your ducats I wanted more’n yeou, I’m goin’ tew begin my protractin’ cerebellum by rollin’ off —”

In the midst of his speech Boston Bill attempted to make an appropriate gesture, when one of the slabs that formed the flooring of the platform slipped, and he shot down through the opening thus made with far more haste than elegance.

Fortunately he had not far to fall, and in the twinkling of an eye he lay sprawling under the rude stage, half-hidden from sight.

The building rang with wild cries and laughter.

For a minute the crestfallen hero quivered with righteous indignation, and then he showed himself equal to the emergency.

Regaining his feet with considerable difficulty, he swung his arms about his head, crying:

“Thar, me lord dooks, I hev opened me concert with one of the most onscartin tricks ever gotten up to protract an educated audience. I hed it boxed up, and brung hyar —”

The rest was drowned by the applause that followed.

When it was ended Boston ducked his head, and disappeared behind the curtain.

A minute later the strangest medley of sounds that the listeners had ever heard greeted their ears.

After a brief time this ceased, when the musician again put in an appearance.

“Thar, yeou hev had a genuine feast, me lord dooks, an’ I kin see that yeou hev grown fat, but I marvel not, for sich is the way o’ the well-fed. Neow, if yeou see me for the next few times, yeou may kneow it is on account o’ the atmospherial dilgence that indulges the atmospheric from the dulcian strains that fly aloft from me Laughin’ Jewel like smoke in hayin’-time—no; frost-weed—fly-time—coal kiln—dust-time—camp-meetin’—Christmas—Fourth o’ July—before sunrise—after sundown—on a mountain—in a valley—burnt to death—tied and gagged—squeezed to death—pizened—mad ez a smokin’ rabbit—roastin’ with a bed-bng—tearin’ off the monkey’s collar—in a rain-storm—in a fog! Thet’s it; I knewed I should fetch her—like smoke in a fog.

“Away up north among the b’ars and lions,
I hear the eagle scowl and see the rabbit sneeze;
I chase the wild goose ’cross the ’tater patch,
And taste the possum-scented breeze.

“Without a friend, without a care—

“Oh, Lor’!”

Boston Bill had barely begun the second stanza of his doggerel, when whack went something against a post near him.

For full a minute not a sound was heard.

“Wot that a comin’!” cried the musician.

I reckon, and thar am its mate!” yelled a voice from the crowd, when a missile hurtled through the air to pass within a few inches of the Yankee’s head.

“Gosh! I never seed a shootin’ star under kiver afore,” and quick as a flash he darted behind the curtain.

Without knowing to what he referred as the “shootin’ star,” the spectators howled and roared vociferously.

For several minutes the din was incessant.

At last Boston Bill ventured to poke his head into sight and ask:

“Am the side show over?”

“No—no!” yelled one of the excited throng. “Jess show yerself, old sheepskin! That’s all we ax.”

“Gosh! I ain’t up for public expedition yet.”

“Go on with your old show,” cried another. “We are tired o’ waitin’.”

“Thet’s jess wot ails this old bird. The next on the ducket am sum tall singin’ by the ginovine Bos—”

Splurge went something against the curtain, and a fearful odor instantly filled the room.

“Jeeman Cricket!” gasped Bill, clapping his hand to his mouth, “the ’tater rot hes got us!”

“Give it to him. Now is your time, boys!” shrieked Jim Allison. “We’ll show the covey who runs this shebang!”

Following this was such a cloud of eggs, potatoes, anything, in short, which the spectators had found to take with them, flung about Boston Bill’s head, that he was glad to dodge “behind the scene.”

When the storm had somewhat passed, he again stepped in front of his audience, saying:

“Look hyar, I hev got me pocket full o’ yeour ducats, and neow if yeou want to see the show, jess giv a chap a chance to protract yeou.”

“Yes, give him the chancel!” yelled the excited Allison, “aid thet, too!” when, with all his force, he threw a rotten egg, that struck Boston Bill squarely upon the chin.

The uproar that succeeded was perfectly deafening, and while it lasted the outraged musician calmly wiped the unwholesome debris from his face.

Then his small, glittering eyes slowly swept the throng around him.

“Yeou hev got to shake the dust from this place party lively!” shouted a sun-bronzed miner, as he drew back his arm to throw another missile at the musician.

“Jesso!” exclaimed Bill, as he dodged the object, and in doing it, tripped, and fell heavily upon the stage.

CHAPTER XIV.

“I RUN THIS SHOW!”

WILDER shouts than ever rang from the excited mob as the Yankee fell, and before he could arise he was literally deluged with a mass of matter hurled about him.

Suddenly a clear, stentorian voice cried:

“Hold!”

As if by magic every move upon the part of the assailants was instantly checked.

Boston Bill stood like a shadow coolly facing his foes.

“So yeou thought tew drive me eout, me lord dooks,” he said, calmly. “Pears to me yeou are a lot o’ pesky fools arter I hev got your dollars in me pock—”

The crowd began to move again, when once more the clear, commanding tone ordered them to remain quiet.

“Yeou see,” said the musician, “thet if I am a poor picked chicken without a coop to roost in I hev a friend.”

The surprised spectators looked in every direction for some indication of said friend, but nowhere was he to be seen.

“Oh, yeou can’t spy him eout, but he’s got his peepers on yeon all the same, and a pair uv shooters, tew. Ain’t yeon, Fighting Joe?”

“Yeou bet!” came the reply.

The voice seemed to come from behind the farther end of the bar.

The listeners were awed into silence.

“He ain’t all,” Boston Bill went on. “Whar are yeon, Jake Pelton?”

“Here, cap’n, all primed and ready!” cried one from an opposite quarter.

“Jesso. And yeon, Hi Allen?”

“Jess let that red-headed chap move, and I’ll show ye!” came a deep bass tone from under the temporary stage.

Jim Allison felt a thrill of terror as he heard the ominous words.

“Are yeou ready fer bizness, Ben Jones and Sam Gray and Luke Williams and—”

“Yes—yes—yes!” chorused the different voices, all from under the stage. “We are all ready for work.”

“Good! At the fust move any one on ‘em makes, pepper him, and all t’others thet follow him.”

“All right!”

“Heave ahead, old hoss!” said the one behind the bar, when the others had finished. “We are spoilin’ fer fun!”

“Yeou see heow tis, me gentle lambs,” said Boston Bill, grimly, as he gazed upon the crowd, who were actually trembling with a fear not easily shaken off. “I run this show!”

“Go ahead with yer circus,” exclaimed Jim Allison. “We didn’t tend to harm ye. Only we wanted a leetle fun.”

“And run me eout o’ town on a split stick, ‘squire!”

“Git along with yer crow!”

“Shol. Guess, me sweet bantam, the fun am on our side o’ the coop!”

“Git ahead with yer performance. We want to git home.”

“Waal, I swan tew gosh! looks tew me es ef I wan’t in any hurry. I hev got yer ducats, and thet’s all I kin hyar fer. Howsmever, I ain’t goin’ tew be mean, ef yeou are, and I’m goin’ tew give yeon the best show yeou ever seed.”

“Let it go. We will call it all square.”

“Neow, don’t yeon, either, ‘squire. I hev knum hyar tew give ‘em concerts, and give ‘em concerts I am goin’ tew. So grin and bear it!”

A low chuckle came from under the stage that fairly chilled the blood in the veins of the spectators.

“Look sharp, boys,” said the Yankee, “I am going to start the evens.”

“Ready!” came from at least half-a-dozen voices in rapid succession.

With a light laugh Boston Bill resumed his performances, while a stillness rivaling death fell upon the scene.

Never, we dare say, was an entertainment given to so attentive an audience.

Not even a whisper broke the silence throughout the whole programme; but with bated breath and straining eyes the lookers-on stood like blocks of granite, expecting, dreading, they knew not what.

At last the "show" was ended.

Boston Bill came forward with a low bow.

"Thar, me lord dooks, the time's up and yeou ken go hum to yeour maminies. I'm pesky glad yeou hev hed sich a good time, and I trust the next time yeou undertake tew drive the ginooine Willum Boston yeou'll take 'im when he ain't around. Neow scat!"

Glad to escape, the spectators rushed for the door pell-mell, and 'mid a wild confusion dashed out into the street.

"Peg the last chick, boys, ef he don't bounce!" yelled Bill, fairly convulsed with laughter.

"Oh, marcy!" gasped the breathless Allison, "ain't I glad we are out o' thet scrape. How many d'ye s'pose he had hid away?"

"Dunno! Don't it beat all nater? We went in thar fer fun and got corraled in arnest!"

There was never in Lower Lead a more thoroughly disgusted and heart-sick party than that.

Fairly boiling over with rage, Tom Bradley sought the leading spirits of the miners.

"Let's form and fight the coyotes. We can whip 'em in a square stand-up fight."

"Dunno, Tom," replied a florid miner. "I sh'u'dn't be s'prised ef he bad a hundred thar!"

"Bah! There can't be more'n half-a-dozen! Come on and we'll fix 'em!"

It was in vain, however, that he tried to induce them to attempt it. They had seen quite enough of Boston Bill for a time.

"Waal, I swan to pepper!" exclaimed the Yankee, ending off a hearty laugh with these words, as soon as he saw the crowd in front of Mack's disperse. "I wonder who ruu this show arter all. Didn't I s'prise 'em, thought?"

The barkeeper alone remained in the room, and he was all excitement.

Fairly dancing about, he exclaimed:

"You're a brick, William—"

"Willum, me gentle dook."

"William Boston, you're a brick!"

"Of course I am, a hard wood one."

"But how in the name did you get those men secreted there and me not know it?"

"Thet is a leetle kurus, 'squire. They're gone neow, tew."

"Gone?"

"Jess look fer yeourself."

"I—I can't stop now."

"Waal, I want tew go eout for a stramble," and he left the room. "Kurus," he muttered to himself, as soon as he had gained the open air, "kurus the old Dutchman was in sich a hurry."

Leaving Boston Bill to look after himself, feeling that he is fully capable of doing it, we will pass over the remainder of the night and resume our narrative with the events of the next day.

Bradley and Clinch were very sore over the defeat of their plans, and early the following morning they sought another interview with Captain Percival.

Early as they were they found the captain astir, and much to their surprise Dan Harris was there, too.

"Seemed to come sooner than you expected, captain," referring to the superintendent.

"Well, yes; affairs are pretty lively at Markham's Lode, and as he intends to go back he didn't stop long."

"Going back?" exclaimed both of the schemers in amazement.

"I think I said as much, gentlemen. Business is looking up, and his brother-in law wanted him to go in partnership with him, and so he decided to do so. I guess it's a good thing for him, too."

"But how will you get along without him here?" asked Bradley, more to get the old man's intentions than anything else.

"Oh, I shall go with him. I suppose you know that *I have sold out!*"

CHAPTER XV.

BOSTON BILL SURPRISES BRADLEY.

"SOLD out?" gasped the amazed rascals.

"Certainly," replied Captain Percival, enjoying their looks of surprise. "You remember that you reconsidered it only yesterday morning."

"I know—yes—that is, who bought your claim?"

"Almost the last man I should have thought of selling to—William Boston!"

"Boston Bill!"

"The same. You seem surprised."

"We are. That is—a-hem—we—we thought as we were your partners you would give us the first offer of the bargain."

"So I should; but as you seemed so sick of the claim, and Mr. Boston offered me five hundred dollars in advance of what I paid I thought he was my man."

"Five hundred dollars in advance? But he is a worthless scamp, Captain Percival, and can't raise a cent."

"You are mistaken again, gentlemen, for he paid me in advance, and the papers are all made out!"

The schemers were dumfounded.

At last Tom Bradley managed to say:

"Please accept our hearty congratulations, captain. You are a lucky man."

"I am not so sure of that. Lower Lead, in my estimation, is a rich claim."

Unable to conceal their disappointment, the twain soon arose to leave.

"I suppose you will not stop in the city much longer."

"No; I shall go down to Markham's with my family in the Crazy Horse stage this afternoon."

"Well, we wish you success, Captain Percival. Where shall we be likely to find our new partner?"

"At Mack's, I think."

"Don't it beat all creation?" exclaimed Jack, as soon as they had escaped the captain's presence.

"I don't understand it. I am afraid that Yankee means mischief."

"But what can he do alone?"

"True enough. We can handle him, and we must! I have just hit upon a desperate move, and we must carry it out."

"Anything to beat that Yank. I tell ye, Tom, we are bound to do that!"

"Sho-o! waal, I swan to gracious, I sh'u'd es quick think uv blowin' a pair uv eyes inter a blind mule's head with a pitch-fork!"

Turning in amazement, they beheld Boston Bill almost at their sides.

Noticing their surprise, he drawled out:

"Don't I look *honipocus*, my lord dooks! But I jess fear I hev found a gray hair among me flowing locks. Won't yeou see ef yeou can't find one jess by me furder ear?"

"Can't stop; we are in a hurry!" growled Bradley.

"Sho-o! Yeou look like it. Look, tew, es ef yeou war humsick! Wot's a good tew-year-old colt—"

"Hang your colts! Have you bought into the Lower Lead claim?"

"Gosh! I don't see wot yeou want to hang the colt for. I didn't think they were so pesky cheap. Mebbe yeou don't like colts, 'squi—"

"Have you bought out Captain Percival?"

"Ef yeou won't b'lieve him yeou won't me, me gentle dook. But 'beout the colt—"

"Hang the colt. Do you propose to hold your share of the mine?"

"I guess the papers will. Oh, while I think uv it, 'squires, I hev hired a superintendent."

"Hired a superintendent! What do you mean?"

"Waal, I mean that I hev spoke fer a chap tew boss the business at the mill. Yeou kneow I'm a little green 'bont grindin' the yaller stuff. If 'twar corn or peas—"

"Hold on, you infernal Yankee. Don't you know Mr. Clinch and I have a two-thirds claim in the mine?"

"Sho! So yeou dew, kem to think on't."

"Then by what authority do you hire a superintendent without consulting us?"

"Waal, yeou see, 'squires, I am goin' tew sort uv run the machine meself!"

The twain looked upon him in blank amazement. Was the man mad, or was he a fool? But stay, he had spoken carelessly; perhaps he was trying to have a little sport at their expense.

"You were joking, Mr. Boston?"

"No more'n a mule when he's jess kickin' the ears right off yeour head!"

"But you don't run Lower Lead mine!" gritted Bradley, fiercely. "We are two against you."

"I don't keer ef yeou are twenty-tew, I'm goin' tew run this mill consarn to suit me own idea!"

Bradley turned livid in the face, as he exclaimed:

"Then you mean war to the hilt!"

"Waal, I didn't say ennything 'bout war nor the hilt either."

"But you intend to oppose us?"

"Yeou are good fer guessing, 'squire. Yeou see, yeou hev laid yeour plans to kapter this mine, but, me lord dooks, yeou hev got to be taller than the ginooine Boston Bill ef yeou du."

The villain gnashed his teeth.

"Fool, I have a mind to strike you dead where you stand!"

"Waal, reckon there ar' ducats enough in me pockets tew pay me funeral bills."

"Dog, be careful; you are on dangerous ground!"

"Then I'll be ready to step one side es soon es I hear the 'arthquake comin'."

Bradley paused, too perplexed to know what to say. His rage was fast getting the best of him; somehow, he dreaded, more than he was willing to own, the man before him.

"Who is it you expect to act as superintendent?"

"A pard that ain't goin' back on me; and he's not only goin' to act but he's goin' tew be superintendent, tew."

"His name?"

"Don't be so pesky curus, me lamb. It is Burke Stanton."

"Buckskin Burke?"

"Jess so. Reckon yeou hev heerd on hin."

Tom Bradley had heard of him and knew that he stood high in the estimation of the Lower Lead miners as a cool, dauntless, true-hearted man.

"Boston Bill, I have this proposition to make you. Let us be friends and keep that chap of a Stanton out of the claim."

"Yeou ar' afcerd o' im, Tom Bradley. Waal, I don't blame yeou. I hev seen wuss men nor yeou afcerd o' im. 'Sides, yeou the same as stole Birch Carver's share o' the mine and yeou ain't agoin' tew keep it!"

"I should like to know what you are coming at."

"I'spect es much. Deon't yeou want to sell yeour shares eout, me lord dooks? I'll give yeou five hundred dollars a-piece."

"When you do, let us know, Mr. Boston."

"I will. By the way, tew be sartin o' it, I'll tell yeou neow that I'm goin' tew buy Birch Carver's share back, to-morrer!"

"Furies! you are an idiot!"

"And yeou are *hojus higis higits!*"

With an oath, Bradley sprang forward to deal Boston a furious blow, when a sharp voice behind him caused him to pause and look hastily back.

"Hold!" was spoken.

He and Clinch both looked in vain for the speaker.

When they turned to face Boston Bill again, he had disappeared around an adjacent building.

"Let him go," declared Jack, "he ain't auy account."

"I am not so sure of that. But we must take a bold stand against him."

"Yes; and win."

"Of course we are not going to be roped in by that chap. Still, I fear it will be no easy job to match that Stanton."

"I tell ye no, Tom. We must run that Boston off the track before he comes. 'Tis our only chance."

"You are right. He must die within an hour. Do you think he goes armed?"

"No. In fact, I know he doesn't."

"Then we can deal him a cold hand without trouble."

CHAPTER XVI.

GETTING DESPERATE.

The first movement of Bradley and Clinch was to find Allison, when plans were quickly laid to have Boston Bill disposed of by fair means or foul.

"Pick a quarrel with him, and then challenge him to fight. We can manage it so he shall be the unlucky man, you know," and he nodded knowingly.

"Will you do it?" asked Bradley, eagerly.

"Just show him to me."

"All right. We shall find him at Mack's."

"Then here I go."

"We'll come by an' by, in season to see the fun," said Bradley, too shrewd to be there at first.

A few minutes later Jim Allison set out upon his object.

From experience, he knew that he had a dangerous man to deal with, and resolved to be prepared for him this time.

Accordingly, his first step was to hunt up three or four of his associates, upon whom he knew he could depend, and enlist them in his work.

Then, encouraged with the promised support of them, he hurried to Mack's to find his would-be victim.

Boston Bill was there scraping away on his old fiddle as if there was not a care for him in the world.

Quite a crowd was gathered around applauding the player vociferously.

Unminding them, Allison entered the room, and, in passing by Boston, who sat near the door, he purposely, as we know, tripped and nearly fell to the floor.

Staggering to his feet, he faced the musician, crying:

"Look here, Mister Yankee Boston, this may be all well enough for you, but there ain't any fun in it for me."

"Shol wa'al, I'll gin you 'Greenland's Larfin' Hills,' squire. They du say that is the most dulcet o' all the strains. Hyar it is."

"No 'tain't!" fairly shrieked the other. "Before ye tech that fiddle ag'in ye're goin' to 'pologize to me fer yer conduct."

"Thee's cute. I 'pologize, and am pesky sorry some one else hadn't hurt your feelings, me gentle dook. Ar' yeou ready for me moosic?"

"Dog of a Yankee, d'ye mean to add injury to insult? Hyur ye hev been 'busin' me like a peccary. I tell ye that's got to be a settlement."

"Sho—o-o! I'll pay yeou in me dulcin strains jest as soon as Mister Mack will let me off."

Allison fairly foamed at the mouth, while the bystanders, enjoying the scene hugely, were laughing and jesting at his expense.

"Fool!" he hissed, almost in the other's face. "I'll teach ye to poke fun at me. Wot did ye trip me up fer then?"

"Ef I did it wur fer the fun o' seein' yeou a sprawlin' on the floor."

"Then ye allow that ye did it?"

"Waal, I swar' I didn't kneow that I hed."

"Dare ye deny it?"

"Gosh, thar' ain't ennythin' to deny! Shall I play yeou Yankee Doo-dle? I am—"

"Stop, or I'll make ye wish ye had never set eyes on me!"

"Crotch all hemlock! wot ar' yeou drivin' at?"

"Ye!" fairly yelled Allison.

"An' ain't hit me yit!"

A loud burst of laughter greeted this sally, which nettled the bar-keeper to still greater madness.

Moving about uneasily, he adroitly approached Boston, exclaiming:

"I suppose you deny the stories ye hev told 'bout me?"

"Yeour a queer chap, 'squire. Alwus a peggier' at somethin' an' never hittin' yeour mark!"

"Ye shall find that I don't alwus miss!" and he attempted to deal Bill a furious blow with his clenched hand.

We said "attempted," for he did miss.

Boston Bill threw up his arm, and at the same instant gave him a stunning clip.

A wild roar followed this.

"Ten to one the Yankee beats!" cried one of the lookers-on.

Jim Allison no longer controlled his passion.

"Ye hev sed ye'd lick me within an inch o' my life, an' ye'll never get a better time!"

"I never said so, me—"

"You lie, and I can prove it! Ben Daniels, didn't ye hear him say so?"

"Yes, I did," retorted the ruffian, who was one of his chosen "backers."

"And ye, Joe Penny?"

"I heerd him."

"Wot d'ye say, Paul Bywittle?"

"I say he said so. I heerd es plain es the bark o' a coon, and says I to myself: 'Mayhap ye'll hev to eat 'em words sum time.'"

"So he shall. Boston Bill, d'ye deny it now?"

"I don't want ennythin' more to du with yeou. It's time to go to the mine."

"Fool, ye are a coward. I challenge ye to shoot with me, an' the best man wins!"

"Sha'n't du ennythin' o' the kind. I reckon I knew which side o' the bread me butter is on. Good-by," and he started for the door.

"Ye don't go out till ye give me satisfaction!" cried Allison, springing in front of the other, while his confederates were not slow to follow his example.

Boston Bill looked from one to another with a gaze of utter contempt.

"Yeou ar' a funny set of bo-peeps, and I swan two of yeou hev got red heads."

"Draw yer shooter and defend yerself!" yelled the leader, brandishing at the same moment a cocked revolver.

"Me lord dooks," exclaimed the Yankee, as coolly as if the desperadoes thirsting for his blood were a thousand miles away, "I never hed a pistol, or a gun, or a knife, 'cept the old horn-handled jack-knife dad gin me, in me hand, and o' coarse I ain't goin' tew shootin' folks neow. I swan, I'd ruther send yeou sky high than to hurt yeou. The day—"

Allison and his companions heard that, but if Boston said more it was lost.

He sprang forward with the agility of a panther, and quick as a flash the ruffians were piled upon the floor.

They could never tell how it was done. The spectators were equally as much in the dark.

The baffled villains, however, to their sorrow, found that it was true.

The bystander's saw the tall form of the Yankee stand above them for an instant, and then he calmly said, as he turned to the door:

"I guess I will go deown and see how 'fairs are at the mine. Ef 'em chaps want me, jess send me their keerd."

As the defeated four were staggering to their feet, Bill passed out of the building.

Outside he met Tom Bradley and Clinch, but unheeding them, he hurried toward the mine.

Well aware that Allison had failed in his game, the schemers followed after the Yankee without entering at Mack's.

Boston Bill found quite a crowd of miners around the mill, and giving all a friendly "good-mornin'," he entered the counting-room.

Bradley and Clinch soon after came in with sullen looks upon their countenances.

Five, ten minutes sped by, and work-hour had come.

"Where is your new superintendent, Mister Boston?" asked Bradley, as he secretly exulted over the fact that Burke Stanton had not arrived.

"Dunno; he promised to kem airly this mornin'; I'm afeared he is not comin'."

"I know he is not. I s'pose you will abandon work, in that case, for the day. I find that the majority of the miners are opposed to do anything under the circumstances."

"Thet don't make enny difference. Yeou kin call the roll, an' we'll start that old shebang of a grinder ter onct. I'll run the consarn till Mr. Stanton kems."

"No, you don't," gritted Bradley, trembling with passion. "I have stod all the insolence from you that I propose to."

"All right, 'squire; if yeou don't call off the names, I will."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MAN IN BUCKSKIN.

"MEN," said Bradley, turning to the wondering miners, "are you willing to let that Yankee cur come in here and say what you shall do?"

Of course he had men ready to answer him, and the reply came almost instantly:

"No—no; put him out of the building—lynch him!"

"You had better git if you value your life," said Bradley to Boston.

"I dunno; I hev an idea that we air goin' tew settle this thing right off."

"So I say; don't yon, Jack?"

"Of course, we can't nor won't go on in this way."

"Jesso; either yeou tew hev got tew leave or I hev."

The speaker seemed calm enough, but there was an ominous ring in his voice.

"What will yeou take for your share?" asked the Yankee, a moment later.

"Won't sell at any price, an' there ain't power in Lower Lead to drive us out."

"Sho! Mebbe I could put a hornet in yeour ear. S'pose'n our old pard should advise yeou, too."

"We will not delay—"

"Yes, you will, Peter Graves!"

Tom Bradley sprang clear from the floor, as the words rang in his ears.

He turned, expecting to see someone standing at his elbow, but, to his surprise, no one was there.

"It's a leetle cur'ons-how the dead will seem to hang 'round us arter we hev played some bad tricks on 'em when they tarried on this comet," said Boston Bill, facing the crowd. "I onct knowed o' a slick kind o' chap ez ever strapped the roads o' Sacramenter, till one pitch-pine night a feller with master evil eyes, an' a huge club, laid in the bushes an' whelped him over the head till he war exclusively stunned. Rough, wa'n't it, my gentle goats?"

"Waal, es I war sayin', the poor chap went tew that better land whar the good folks go if they are good, and the chap w'at slewed 'im lit out, and the Lord knows whar he is to-day."

"Do you, Peter Graves?"

Again the voice he had heard before sounded in his ears, and Tom Bradley trembled like an aspen.

None of the miners seemed to hear it.

He turned to Clinch, whose gaze had become fixed upon him.

"Es I say, ef a feller is goin' up a hill 'hind a cart, it's a right smart help fer him tew catch hold it, and the more he holds back the easier he gets along; but ef that cross board happens tew pull eout it's a pesky pull back tew him, and worse nor as ef he hadn't ketched hold o' it. 'Twas 'bont so with the chap I war speaking of; leastways I run an idea it would hev been so ef the cart had been thar and he hadn't been sumwhar else. Neow the feller hes been found eout, and jess as soon as the speerits move 'nough he'll hev tew gin in."

"Say, 'Squire Bradley, ef yeou hed killed enny one sh'u'dn't yeou say yeou oughter be punished ri—"

The ghastly look that came to the other's countenance caused him to pause.

"Git the camp-fire—quick! He's killed one—I mean he's killed himself!"

Tom Bradley quickly recovered his composure, to exclaim:

"What do you mean, Bill Boston?"

"I only sed that yeou had killed someone—"

The appearance of the other's visage caused the Yankee to pause in his speech a second time. He quickly said:

"Scuse me, 'squire, I meant tew say ef yeou—hooray! hyar kems one on me partners, and I ain't goin' tew fool emny more."

To the surprise of all, Birch Carver appeared on the scene.

"Where's cool Burke Stanton?" cried Bill.

"He couldn't come," replied the new-comer. "There is mischief to pay another way. However, he'll be here by to-morrow morning."

"It's jess es well. We can run the machine till then slick es a brass button."

Turning to Bradley and Clinch, he continued:

"Neow thet Mister Carver hes kem, o' coarse we shall let him run the consarn."

"Not by a long shot, Sir Yankee. We will find out before we go any further who runs this claim."

"Birch Carver, what are you back here for?"

"I have come back, Tom Bradley, to ask you to give up the papers with which I conveyed my share of the mine to you. You drove me to the bargain, and I declare that it is not binding. I have the five hundred dollars—"

"Bah! you are a fool! You forget that we have the same power over you now that we had then. I defy you to break the bargain. I will give you five minutes to leave the mine in."

"You count without your host this time, Tom Bradley," said Carver, boldly advancing to his side. "The man I have supposed I killed is alive! I have seen him to-day! But the one who fell by your hand cannot come back till the grave gives up its dead!"

As the speaker slowly uttered the words, Bradley's face assumed the pallor of the dead.

"Die, dog!" he fairly yelled, and drawing a heavy sheath-knife, he seemed about to spring upon the other, while his eyes flashed with a murderous fire, when a clear, stern voice cried:

"Hold, Peter Graves! Put down that knife!"

Bradley hesitated, and as the same tone repeated the command, the knife dropped from his nerveless grasp.

"Who spoke?" he gasped, as he stared around.

But of all the spectators, not one had seemed to speak.

"Tis mockery!" he exclaimed.

"Not so much as you may think, Tom Bradley," replied Carver. "You have come here with the avowed purpose of getting possession of this mine by foul means, if not by fair. Now, with no intention of taking advantage of that might which you say is law, I, as one who once considered you as a friend, advise you to leave this valley at once. I am willing to take back for what you paid me the share I once owned here, and Mr. Boston will buy the other third."

"It seems to me you are very forward in planning for others," sneered Bradley. "I hold a controlling interest here, and I don't propose to give it up!"

"You had better, Peter Graves!"

Again the mysterious voice rang in his ears.

At this point in the exciting scene a great commotion began in the crowd outside the building.

Then, amid loud shouts and clapping of hands a new-comer appeared in the doorway.

At sight of him Tom Bradley reeled backward, crying:

"Burke Stanton!"

Jack Clinch was hardly less startled.

"Buckskin Burke!" cried the crowd.

The new arrival was a man of medium size, dark hair, brown mustache, large grey eyes, and evidently not more than twenty-eight years of age.

Pushing his way through the miners he gained the side of Boston Bill.

We will say that no man was known in Lower Lead who was liked better than cool Burke Stanton.

"Well, Bill," he said, "are you ready to begin work? When I saw Mr. Carver last I thought I should not be able to come so soon, but fortune favored me so far that I am here."

"An' I'm glad on't. Miners of Lower Lead, behold yeour new superintendent."

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONCLUSION.

LOUD cheers rent the air as Boston Bill made his announcement.

"Long Live Buckskin Burke!"

It was several minutes before anything like a silence fell on the scene.

"Thar, pard," declared Boston, "I knowed it w'u'd be all right. Hyur's the roll, and es soon es yeou hev read it over it will be time tew start bizness."

Tom Bradley stood by in sullen silence as Stanton took the list of names. As he was about to speak, he exclaimed, fiercely:

"Miners of Lower Lead, I appeal to you. Every man who answers to Burke Stanton's call wrongs the rightful owners of their claim. I ask you who has treated yon best: that Yankee dog, there, or myself?"

Not a word of reply broke the stillness that succeeded.

Burke trembled for the result.

Cool Burke quietly waited for him to continue.

Boston Bill picked up his fiddle and began to carelessly play.

Finally Jim Allison stepped from the associates he had led there, calling:

"I say this is all a fraud. I say, let's pitch that Yankee inter t' river. He ain't fit fer the buzzards to pick on!"

His companions quickly assented to what he had said, and for a moment it seemed they would attempt to carry out the threat.

At that juncture Stanton, in a distinct tone, called off the first name on his list:

"Periah Rantoon."

"Hyur! and every time fer Boston Bill and Buckskin Burke!" exclaimed one of the miners.

Stanton continued to call off the roll, and when he had finished, only four men had refused to answer to their names.

"It is well," said Cool Burke, in a matter-of-fact way. "All those who wish can remain to resume work, and the others shall have a settlement at once."

"Let's give three cheers for Boston Bill!" cried one.

"Curse Boston Bill!" yelled Bradley, and with a horrible oath he seized the knife from the floor and sprang toward the Yankee.

At that moment a gigantic form burst through the crowd.

"Hyur! come!"

Then the sharp report of a rifle rang out, and throwing up his arms, Tom Bradley fell to the floor.

Glaring wildly around, the Mad Mountaineer stood over him.

"Hyur's for another!" shrieked the mysterious being, and had it not been for a by-stander he would have shot Burke Stanton.

In an instant a wild fight was inaugurated, and when it was ended the Mad Mountaineer would no longer continue his predatory war against the inhabitants of Lower Lead.

It was learned that he had been crazed by disappointment, and thinking all he met were against him, had treated them as foes.

As Tom Bradley fell, a stream of blood instantly began to flow from his body.

"I am done for!" he gasped, as he turned his gaze imploringly around him.

Stanton quickly examined the wound to find that the bullet had pierced his vitals so that he had but a few minutes to live.

"Is there no hope for me?"

Burke shook his head.

"It has served me right!" he groaned. "Bill Boston, you have triumphed."

"Only as far as it is right, Peter Graves. I came here to work for the good of the miners, and though I am a queer mortal who works in queer way, I hev succeeded."

"What do you know of me?" Bradley cried, in wonder.

"Only that you are a murderer."

"Alas! 'tis true. But I must go to meet my just punishment. I do, however, I wish to restore to Mr. Carver his rightful own."

His span of life was prolonged enough for him to accomplish his purpose.

"The money I give to you, Jack, my share of the remaining third of the mine, hoping that you will be a better man. What do you say for him as a partner, Mr. Boston?"

"I'm 'greable if he'll only be an honest man."

"I promise that," exclaimed Clinch. "I hev learned at a bitter cost that honesty is the best policy."

"May you never think differently," said Burke, solemnly.

The attention of all was now turned to the dying man.

He struggled for a few minutes, and then he quietly breathed his last.

"The fight for Lower Lead claim is over at last," said Birch Carver.

"Yes; and the right has triumphed," added Stanton.

"Amen."

Peace and prosperity had indeed dawned for the inhabitants of Lower Lead.

The mine proved even richer than was expected, and its owners soon became wealthy from its yield.

Strange Boston Bill stayed in Lower Lead Valley but a short time, when he started for fields of new adventure, where it may be our good fortune to meet him some time. Until then, *au revoir*.

Doubtless all have supposed that the voices heard at Mack's during the "concert" was the result of the musician's ventriloquism, as were the words heard by Tom Bradley at the mill in our last scene.

Thus, one way or another, the "gino oine Willum Boston" had proved himself equal to any emergency.

"Cool Buckskin Burke" was the one Birch Carver had supposed he had killed.

From that time forth Carver was a changed man, and lived in the valley many years.

Jack Clinch did not forget his pledge, and he became a useful and trustworthy citizen.

Captain Percival went to Markham's Lode in company with Dan Harris, where they were both successful.

Dan and Hattie were soon afterward married, and true to the vows they had taken upon themselves, they lived happy and contented in their lot.

To-day no one in Calaveras County is more respected than he, and we look forward to the time when his form will be seen at our national capital, for, we doubt not, he will be elected to congress if he accepts the nomination, which we sincerely hope he will, feeling confident in his honesty and ability.

Last, Burke Stanton must receive our congratulations, and with a promise to greet again his genial countenance, we drop his hand and turn to meet other friends in a different field of work.

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